

A brief history of the Worldwide Biography Conference

"The growing need for work with human biography, including biographical courses, as inaugurated by Prof. Bernard Lievegoed, has become evident in fields of therapy and sociology. Some colleagues already have many years' experience, the exchange of which would be most desirable."

With these opening words in a letter dated 24. July 1989, Dr. med. Michaela Glöckler (D/CH) and Dr. med. Gudrun Burkhard (BR) started a process of networking amongst colleagues all over the world, in preparation for organising professional meetings which evolved later into the biennial Worldwide Biography Conference.

November 1990 - Goetheanum, Dornach Switzerland: "Workshop ..."

The 1st meeting was organised in the Medical Section of the School of Spiritual Science as a "workshop for individuals, who are experienced in, and dedicated to, the development of biography work" held in German. Prof. Dr. med. psych. Bernard Lievegoed (NL) was joined by 36 colleagues from 11 nations; the majority having been trained at his institute NPI in the Netherlands or at the Centre for Social Development in the UK. Michaela Glöckler described Bernard Lievegoed as having become the "father" of "biography work" through his earlier publications about biographical development. Anita Charton (CH) and Josien de Vries (NL) reported on this meeting in the journals *Das Goetheanum* and *Merkurstab*.

Some two thirds of those who attended went on to nurture their professional connections with each other by attending and contributing to further conferences. Michaela Glöckler and Gudrun Burkhard are still actively connected with the movement of biography work developing worldwide. Over the years Anita Charton, Elaine Beadle (NZ/D), Josien de Vries, Krista Braun (GB/CH) and Rinke Visser (NL) have continued to carry and share responsibility for maintaining continuity and development of these professional meetings.

November 1991 - Goetheanum, Dornach Switzerland: "Biographie Konferenz"

The 2nd meeting, hosted in German by the Medical Section, was originally intended only for members of the School of Spiritual Science. However, because some attending were not members, Bernard Lievegoed withdrew his contribution especially prepared for members. This raised questions about how to nurture relations with the School of Spiritual Science whilst opening up of biography work to the wider world.

This meeting was different, partly because, of 42 colleagues attending 32 came from Germany and Switzerland. Many missed the atmosphere of openness experienced in the 1st meeting, so some colleagues, including Albrecht Hemming (D), Anita Charton, Elaine Beadle, Josien de Vries and Krista Braun, decided to open up such meetings to a wider world through the English language.

June 1993 - Centre for Social Development, UK: "1st International Biography Conference"

The 3rd meeting was held in English and attended by c. 50 colleagues. As keynote speakers Michaela Glöckler contributed "Biography Work in relation to the Christ in the Etheric", and Coenraad van Houten (NL/GB) contributed "How to Train Biography Workers". Artistic work was introduced into plenum activities and Class Meetings were held for members of the School of Spiritual Science before and after the conference.

Summer 1994 - Centre for Social Development, UK: "2nd International Biography Conference"

The 4th meeting was held in English and attended by c. 50 colleagues. Afterwards, in addition to a Class Meeting, informal workdays were organised to work with experienced colleagues on professional issues.

February 1995 - Goetheanum, Dornach Switzerland: "Biographie Konferenz"

The 5th meeting was hosted in German by the Medical Section (not attended by Michaela Glöckler) for members only of the School of Spiritual Science with the theme "Working hygienically and therapeutically with biography work as a path of self knowledge and understanding of destiny". The enthusiastic attendance also by many members without any immediate professional connection to biography work was observed.

Parallel to the three German language only meetings at the Goetheanum an impulse emerged, which was subsequently directed by Gudrun Burkhard into the formation of the "Verein für Biographiearbeit" (also called the "Biographieverein"). This "Verein" was intended to function as an international umbrella organisation to regulate certification of trainings in biography work and maintenance of quality in professional practice (see below: dissolution of "Verein für Biographiearbeit" in 2003).

Summer 1995 - Centre for Social Development, UK: "3rd International Biography Conference"

The 6th meeting was held in English and attended by c. 50 colleagues. As a keynote speaker, Rinke Visser picked up on the contribution by Michaela Glöckler in 1993. Before the conference, in addition to a Class Meeting, two day Master Classes were introduced to replace the informal workdays of the previous year.

After this meeting it was decided that International Biography Conferences should not be held in one place more than three times in a row. An initiative to move the conference to Brazil, however, could not be implemented.

June / July 1996 - Land en Bos, Netherlands: "4th International Biography Conference"

The 7th meeting was held in English at a Christian Community Conference Centre, with Master Classes and a Class Meeting before the opening. The theme "Signs of Our Time" ('Recognition' - see below) referred to the current world situation approaching the turn of the Millennium. Felicitas Vogt (D) served as a keynote speaker, and a Market Place was introduced to enable the wider sharing of professional experience and issues through c. 90 minute workshops and presentations.

June / July 1997 - Land en Bos, Netherlands: "5th International Biography Conference"

The 8th meeting was again held in English at the same venue, with Master Classes and a Class Meeting before the opening. The theme "Mind the Gap - Dealing with the Abyss" ('Offering' - see below) continued to address the current world situation before the turn of the Millennium, to which Elaine Beadle and Sigrun Hardardottir (DK) contributed as keynote speakers; once again a Market Place was organised.

July 1998 - Freiburg im Breisgau, St. Georgien, Germany: "6th International Biography Conference"

The 9th meeting was held in English at Albertus Magnus Haus, for a network of c. 50 colleague from 9 European nations, South Africa and New Zealand. This series of conferences was perceived to be evolving in alignment with the "Seven Sacraments" (see above: 'Recognition' and 'Offering'), so the theme of "'Transformation' - Stepping into the Future" was chosen. Albrecht Hemming and Blanca Sanchez de Munain (E) served as keynote speakers; Christopher Bee (GB/D) and Elaine Beadle facilitated integration of the Original Work by Gerhard Reisch (1899-1975) "A Path of Knowledge in Pictures" into the conference process.

The organisation group, Christine Pflug (D), Elaine Beadle, Gudrun Korte (D), Josien de Vries, Rinke Visser and Sigrun Hardardottir, asked other colleagues to take on responsibility for organising a 7th International Biography Conference in 1999 or 2000, dedicated to the Sacrament 'Communion'. Also Anita Charton appealed for the integration of the English and German meetings (see above 1992) into one conference.

When it became clear, however, that the new organisation group would not be able to fulfil its task, Elaine Beadle and Krista Braun took up the initiative to create the next meeting in 2001.

June / July 2001 - Goetheanum, Dornach Switzerland: "1st Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 10th meeting was promoted in both English and German with the theme "Pathways to New Community", to which Gudrun Burkhard, Michaela Glöckler and Paul Mackay (NL/CH) contributed as keynote speakers. Simultaneous translation between various languages was facilitated in the plenum sessions: English, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish. Circa 110 colleagues attended from 10 European nations (c. 50% German native speaking), Argentina, Australia, Brasil, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and the USA. The intention of this new series of conferences was to further build up a worldwide network for the development of biography work based on anthroposophical research.

The first three Worldwide Biography Conferences were carried by Elaine Beadle and Krista Braun, jointly hosted by Paul Mackay in the Social Section and Michaela Glöckler in the Medical Section, on behalf of the General Anthroposophical Section of the School of Spiritual Science and facilitated by the Goetheanum Conference Offices. The familiar programme continued with pre-conference Master Classes and Class Meetings, keynote speakers, a Market Place and further development of social artistic contributions by Christine Gruwez (B), Christopher Bee and Rinke Visser during plenum sessions. The principle of providing financial assistance to colleagues from nations with limited resources, or travelling intercontinental, became more firmly established through the further development, management and transfer of resources generated by, and through, the organisation of this new series of conferences.

May / June 2003 - Goetheanum, Dornach Switzerland: "2nd Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 11th meeting was promoted in English and German with the theme "Anchored in Life - Committed to Spirit - Towards the Future". Albrecht Hemming, Coenraad van Houten and Michaela Glöckler contributed as keynote speakers. Simultaneous translation and limited financial assistance were facilitated; enabling c. 100 colleagues from 9 European nations (c. 50% German native speaking), Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Russia and the USA, to take part in the pre-conference Master Classes" and Class Meeting, Marketplace workshops and social artistic activities in plenum.

During this conference, the dissolution of the "Verein für Biographiearbeit", originally directed by Gudrun Burkhard (see above 1995), was formally announced. Simultaneously colleagues were invited to come forward, who would be capable of contributing to the process of creating new organs of international collaboration to serve the professional development of biography work on a worldwide platform.

Directly after this conference Anita Charton hosted the first meeting at the Goetheanum of the International Trainers Forum (ITF), attended by representatives of training programmes in 13 nations. The ITF meets annually, and operates as an organ within the General Anthroposophical Section of the School of Spiritual Science under the mentorship of Paul Mackay, representing the department of "Reincarnation and Karma". Members, who are responsible for carrying certified training programmes, engage in spiritual scientific research together, exchange professional experience about the development of trainings, monitor the goals and quality of each other's trainings, mentor new trainings, accompany transition in training faculties and negotiate the peer recognition of trainings in collaboration with the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum. (www.internationaltrainersforum.com)

In November 2003 a carrying group met in Mannheim to establish the International Professional Forum as a world-wide-web based platform facilitated by Walter Seyffer (D) for the purpose of networking professional developments in biography work. This Forum co-ordinates its activities particularly with a view to serving national professional associations as well as individual colleagues. The impulse to found the German and Swiss professional associations also originated at this meeting. Meanwhile professional associations have also been established in Japan, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. (www.biography-work.org)

International Trainers Forum and International Professional Forum report their development and make contributions during the Worldwide Biography Conferences.

June 2005 - Goetheanum, Dornach Switzerland: "3rd Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 12th meeting was promoted in English and German with the theme "Global Turbulence", during which Christine Gruwez, Jaap van der Haar (NL), Manfred van Doorn (NL) and Rinke Visser served as keynote speakers. Simultaneous translation and limited financial assistance were facilitated; enabling c. 100 colleagues from 10 European nations (c. 50% German native speaking), Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Russia and the USA, to take part in pre-conference Master Classes and Class Meeting, Marketplace workshops and social artistic activities in plenum.

During preparations leading up to this conference, it became apparent for different reasons, that after holding three consecutive conferences at the Goetheanum, it would be prudent to hold the next conferences somewhere else in Europe. So responsibility for the organisation of the next conference was formally passed to Rinke Visser and then subsequently organised by the Instituut voor Biografie in Driebergen, Netherlands represented, at that time, by Marijke Steenbruggen (NL) and Leo Beth (NL), amongst others.

The International Trainers Forum held their annual meeting directly after the conference.

June 2007 - Rolduc, Kerkrade, Netherlands: "4th Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 13th meeting was organised in a Catholic Seminary and promoted in English and German with the working title "Inside Out". It was attended by c. 130 colleagues from 12 European nations (c. 50% Dutch and c. 20% German native speaking), Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Russia and the USA. Conference plenums were held in English and German; simultaneous translation facilities were not provided. Sponsorship by the Iona Stichting (NL) enabled financial help for those travelling long distances or from countries with limited resources. Much thought and care went into facilitating group work with social artistic content created around themes inspired by Paulo Coelho's "The Alchemist". Whilst a Market Place was held, pre-conference Master Classes and Class Meeting were not available. Working with the principle that all

participants are co-creators, contributions from keynote speakers were also not invited; instead emphasis was placed on nurturing work in smaller coherent groups throughout the conference.

Since the Instituut voor Biografie could only organise one meeting, colleagues, committed to maintaining the continuity of these international meetings as a service to the worldwide development of biography work based on anthroposophical research, began looking at how to create an organ which ensures and monitors the organisation of conferences according to minimum standards evolving out of 17 years of experience.

To this purpose a group, including Anita Charton, Christopher Bee, Elaine Beadle, Fumiko Chikami, Joop Grün, Josien de Vries and Rinke Visser, initiated a meeting in Driebergen, Netherlands in December 2007. An initiative carried by Christopher Bee and Fumiko Chikami to facilitate the organisation of the 5th Worldwide Biography Conference in the UK at Emerson College in 2009 was explored and given conditional support. In this way a Continuity Group was formed, to ensure selection of suitable locations and venues for future conferences, as well as to mandate and monitor each Organisation Group, which is then responsible for creating, administrating and documenting a conference. Membership of the Continuity Group is augmented by co-opting colleagues with experience of organising conferences and the independence to be able to fulfil this commitment realistically on a long term basis.

June / July 2009 - Emerson College, United Kingdom: "5th Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 14th meeting was promoted in English and German with the theme "Practising Awareness", to which Christine Gruwez and Arthur Zajonc (USA) contributed respectively as keynote speaker and facilitator of a meditative consciousness schooling process during the morning plenum. The plenum language was English only, simultaneous translations were not available; the availability of financial assistance was supported through sponsorship by the Iona Stichting (NL). In addition to the pre-conference Master Classes and Class Meeting, and the Market Place, separate sessions were formally introduced to look at professional issues, to hear from interest groups and to enable 30 minute short presentations. The conference process was also developed further by dedicating two full evening plenums to the practise of 'conversation' (or 'dialogue') as a professional community. Particular attention was paid to facilitating exchange between the different national groupings represented by c. 130 colleagues from 11 European nations (c. 15% German native speaking), Australia, Brazil, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and USA.

The International Trainers Forum held their annual three-day meeting directly before the conference.

June / July 2011 - Emerson College, United Kingdom: "6th Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 15th meeting was promoted in English and German with the theme "Living in an Awareness of Karma", to which Michaela Glöckler and Anita Charton contributed respectively as keynote speaker and facilitator of a social artistic process during the morning plenum. The plenum language was English only, simultaneous translations were not available; some financial assistance for travel was possible. Pre-conference Master Classes and Class Meeting, the Market Place, reports from interest groups and short presentations were all encompassed. The practise of 'conversation' (or 'dialogue') as a professional community during two full evening plenums was developed further. Circa 110 colleagues from 10 European nations (c. 15% German native speaking), Australia, Brazil, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, South Africa and USA were in attendance.

In the meantime, as a result of concern expressed by various language groups in connection with the last two conferences in the United Kingdom, the Continuity Group has prevailed upon the Organisation Group for the 7th Worldwide Biography Conference at Emerson College to budget for and guarantee practical installation of simultaneous translation facilities in 2013.

The International Trainers Forum held their annual three-day meeting directly before the conference.

June 2013 - Emerson College, United Kingdom: "7th Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 16th meeting was promoted in English and German with the theme "'I' on the Threshold", group work with the Foundation Stone Meditation facilitated by Joop Grün, keynote talks about therapeutic biography work by Tali Sella (IL) and Michaela Glöckler, and moderation by Anita Charton. The effort to provide simultaneous translation English/German was welcome. Financial assistance for participation was generously supported. Pre-conference seminars, workshops, interest group reports, presentations and artistic performances were all much appreciated. The intention to practise 'conversation' ('dialogue') as a professional community on the

second evening could not be realised. 112 colleagues from 10 European nations (c. 27% German native speaking), Brazil, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and USA attended.

The International Trainers Forum held their annual three-day meeting directly before the conference.

Directly after the conference the Continuity Group invited interested colleagues to meet and share ideas about where to hold the 2015 conference. In a circle of circa 27 colleagues an initiative to move East to Dresden, Germany was born and taken up enthusiastically by colleagues from all over Europe, who subsequently formed the largest group (10 colleagues) to organise a conference to date: Carine Biessels (DE), Lothar Flachmann (DE), Gabriele Hardner (DE), Maarten Moens (NL), Camelia Oprea (RO), George Oprea (RO), Gemma Priess (NL), Anna Romanova (RU), Karin Weber (DE), Rita Weber-Wied, (DE).

In October 2013 the Continuity Group met in Basel, Switzerland. Anita Charton, who accompanied the conferences from their inception, resigned. Elaine Beadle and Rinke Visser announced their intention to resign after the next conference. During this meeting the initiative was taken to form a 'Fellowship' to carry continuity and nurture quality for future Worldwide Biography Conferences. In addition the dissolution of the carrying group for the 'International Professional Forum' was announced, and it was formerly proposed and agreed that the Fellowship would henceforth take on responsibility for developing and maintaining a website for the international representation of professional biography work based on anthroposophy.

During 2014 a community of 21 colleagues and 7 institutions resonated with invitation to join the Fellowship by committing themselves to its principle intentions; thus enabling the Fellowship to formally mandate the chairman Albert Schmalhofer of the *Professional Association for Biography Work* in Germany with the task of hosting the organisation of the 2015 conference near Dresden.

June 2015 - Gut Froberg near Dresden, Germany: "8th Worldwide Biography Conference"

The 17th meeting was mediated in English and German with the theme "Wounds and Wonders". The 1st half of the conference (3 nights) was dedicated to seven two-day professional workshops; followed by a one-day excursion to Dresden. During the 2nd half of the conference (3 nights) keynote speaker Christine Gruwez (BE) gave two morning presentations of the Manichaeian schooling path, incorporating pictures of adversary beings and intensive group work in the plenum. Dani Aman (IL) gave an evening talk about 'working with the wound'. Afternoon sessions with short workshops, professional initiatives and community building processes, an evening of artistic performances, and a three-day exhibition of original pictures by Gerhard Reisch were all very much appreciated. Some financial assistance for participation was facilitated. 156 colleagues from 14 European nations (c. 40% German native speaking), Brazil, Canada, Chili, China, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Russia and USA attended.

The International Trainers Forum held their annual three-day meeting directly before the conference.

During the conference the question of how to further develop the Fellowship initiative was shared with the conference community. In October 2015 the coordination (*formerly continuity*) group (cg) for the Fellowship met in Berlin, Germany to review the last conference, bid farewell to Elaine Beadle and Rinke Visser, who accompanied the conferences from their inception, and consider further steps for the development of the Fellowship. In the context of this review process, including meeting with some of the colleagues who carried the 2015 conference organisation, fundamental challenges manifested.

During a meeting in March 2016, the Fellowship cg (*Christopher Bee, Fumiko Chikami, Joop Grün and Josien de Vries, accompanied by Leo Beth*) began intensive work to lay a foundation for a conference community which, through the Fellowship, promotes professionalism in its global networking, and nurtures an ongoing relationship with the *General Anthroposophical Section* of the *School of Spiritual Science* at the *Goetheanum*.

As a consequence of this meeting the cg committed itself to developing a community building process which leads directly to the organisation of a conference at the *Goetheanum* in Switzerland, in collaboration with Paul Mackay representing the department of "Reincarnation and Karma" in the *General Anthroposophical Section*, from 14th to 18th June 2017, dedicated to the development of an innovative social process which can be embraced by a *Worldwide Biography Fellowship*.

The rendering of this brief history of the development of the Worldwide Biography Conference as compiled by Christopher Bee on behalf of the Worldwide Biography Fellowship, in collaboration with Anita Charton, Elaine Beadle and Josien de Vries, is based on conference archives. Should anyone find error or omission, they are heartily invited to email the relevant information to post@wbcf.net. 01.06.2017