

The Hibernia

The Story of a Currency for the World / July 2021

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This one-off publication contextualizes the unique Hibernia currency (HIB) that I created in 2016 for use in worldwide financial and accounting work within the Anthroposophical Movement, as the loose worldwide community centred on the work of Rudolf Steiner is known.

Although technically its relevance and usefulness is neutral as regards philosophy or worldview, the Hibernia was initially created when I was treasurer of the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland (ASI) as a currency that did two things. Firstly, it stood above the two sub-global currencies that the affairs of the ASI were conducted in, pound sterling (GBP) and the euro (EUR). This matched the aspiration of the ASI as belonging to the island of Ireland as a whole, not to either of its constituent polities – the first a part of the UK, the second (the Republic of Ireland) apart from the UK. (See map on p.6.) Secondly, rated at 1:1 to the Swiss franc (CHF), the Hibernia represented the connection to the Anthroposophical Society as a whole (ASW), with its centre at the Goetheanum in Switzerland.

Once created and linked to the CHF, it was obvious that the Hibernia could also be used by the ASW in all its worldwide dealings, the more so, the more these dealings were accomplished through shared bookkeeping. Instead, of a country like Argentina, for example, expressing its obligations to the ASW in terms of ARG:CHF, with CHF representing a foreign currency, it could switch to ARG:HIB, with HIB becoming a shared worldwide currency.

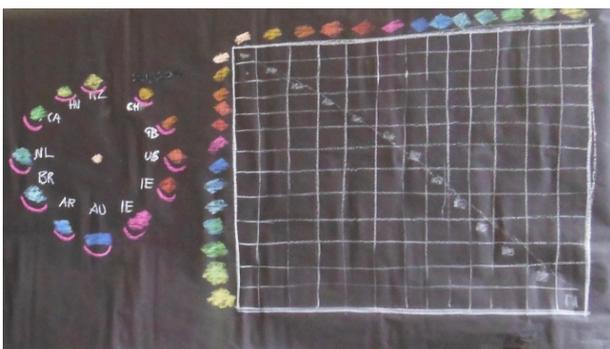
This has yet to be taken up by anyone else but it is the basis of the worldwide accounting of the Economics Conference of the Goetheanum, which has funds in groups of the

Anthroposophical Society in 10+ countries.¹ The 'official' bookkeeping is done locally in the local currency, but replicated overall in a set of books maintained independently. Having established the Hibernia in this way, I wrote about it in *Anthroposophy Worldwide* (3/2017) under the title *The Hibernia – A Currency for the Goetheanum*.

The importance of the HIB is that it also represents an example of money as worldwide bookkeeping – one of Rudolf Steiner's key financial insights.² In the monetary world, this is not as unheard of or even as radical as one might think or suppose. There is a growing literature, to which several colleagues in the Economics Conference have contributed.³ Indeed it is part of a development that has gained momentum since the 2008 global financial crisis to base economics on accounting rather than maths and modeling.

In this sense, it makes the affairs of the ASW a case in point of key developments at the centre of monetary evolution. For this reason, I also wrote *Rudolf Steiner. Financial Genius* (see *Anthroposophy Worldwide* 4/2017), which makes the claim that the way Rudolf Steiner envisaged the financing of the ASW is a policy recommendation in its own right, evidencing that the ASW is by no means a private, inward affair of the members but a contribution to healthy financing in general.

The link of the Hibernia currency to Ireland is not haphazard. Together with my Swiss colleagues, Marc Desaulles and Anita Grandjean, I have been to Ireland several times, beginning in 2003, then with follow-up lectures in Carlow 2015⁴ and 2016⁵ and in



¹ Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, England, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland, USA, and the Goetheanum. See illustration on this page.

² This comes towards the end of his 1922 economics course, *Economics – the World as One Economy* (search aeBookstore.com).

³ Inter alia, *Auditorial Central Banking, Money as Bookkeeping, Perspectives in Finance, Three Kinds of Money, Beyond Brundtland* (search aeBookstore.com). Also *Finance at the Threshold*, Gower 2011.

⁴ The *Colours of Money* seminar and lectures on Steiner, Keynes and Dunlop in the Visual Centre for Contemporary Art in Carlow.

⁵ AGM of the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland.

2017⁶. This engagement with Ireland-Hibernia culminated in our also attending the *Exploring Hibernia Conference* in April 2018, a joint event of the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland, Romania and Switzerland. The main proceedings of this experience, for such it was, have been published as *Guarding the Shores – Exploring Hibernia*.⁷

By way of a postscript, I have included a to date unpublished 'think piece', entitled *Threefold Ireland*. Written in May 2018, my purpose in writing it, as also in reiterating it here, was to ask how or whether the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland lives in the general social life of the island. Beyond self-proclamation, how are we perceived?



The Hibernia
A Currency for the
Goetheanum
March 2017

Though valued 1:1 to the Swiss franc (CHF), the Hibernia is not the instrument of a national economy or of a central bank. It does not exist to *effect* monetary affairs, but to *reflect* them, in this case those of the Anthroposophical Movement worldwide.

The Hibernia was conceived as the counterpart to a potentially important spiritual event, namely, the establishment of the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland as one society active in two countries – the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

This means, however, that the affairs of the Irish Society are conducted in two currencies – the pound sterling (GBP) and the euro (EUR) – but the Society makes its remittances to the Goetheanum via a euro account held in Germany. This arrangement is presumably designed to minimise exchange rate 'losses', but is it not possible instead to conduct our affairs on the basis of a one-world currency, a virtual unit of account, rather than a fiat currency belonging to a world central bank?⁸

⁶ Hibernia Today conference in Callan.
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https://www.lulu.com/search?adult_audience_rating=00&page=1&pageSize=10&q=guarding+the+shores

⁸ Normally currencies are created by countries and given a three-letter code based on the two-letter country code plus the initial letter of the currency where possible.

In the case of Ireland the need was twofold. Firstly, to avoid either of the national currencies being the official or preferred currency, yet enabling members in the one currency area to be able to see (and think) the Society's affairs with the ease that is assured when they are not represented in a 'foreign' currency. Secondly, in order to evaluate and experience directly our link to the Anthroposophical Society as a whole. For this we needed to be able to 'read' in the currency used by that society, which is the Swiss franc (CHF). Accordingly, the Irish Society's finances are now conducted in three currencies – HIB, EUR and GBP – with the Hibernia being the 'higher' of the three.

So much game-playing? Trivialising the Hibernia Mysteries? Maybe, but probably not. Many things of huge importance can be said about Hibernia, to which the world is not entirely asleep. Just after we published our budget in Hibernias the Irish Republic issued a 2 euro coin with Hibernia printed on it and with an image similar to the ship of Samothrace in the Louvre (see adjacent pictures). Here is not the place to reiterate the many things Rudolf Steiner said in these regards, but it is interesting to consider some things he did *not* say – at least, not directly.



Hibernia preceded the subsequent history of Ireland, especially that portion of its history as the first, and possibly worst-treated of England's colonies. From Ireland *as a whole* we can hopefully build a bridge that arches across Europe, from Hibernia to Palestine. Such a bridge is urgently needed.

In 1998, two Swiss colleagues – Marc Desaulles (Treasurer and General Secretary of the Swiss Anthroposophical Society) and Anita Grandjean, (co-founder with Marc of L'Aubier near Neuchatel) – and I published research into the links between global money when understood as accounting, Rudolf Steiner's ideas about three kinds of money, and the essential characteristics of the Hibernia Mysteries.⁹

In essence, we suggested links between:

⁹ Published at the time in various anthroposophical journals in English, French, and German. Also recently in Ireland and as an appendix to *Guarding the Shores – Exploring Hibernia*, op. cit.

i) Trading (represented by income and expense accounts), the ancient saying "I am knowledge but I lack being", and the fact that the male/sun/winter pillar in the Hibernia temples returned to its original shape when pressed against – a fact reflected in the closing or bringing to zero of all accounts at year end, and

ii) Capitalisation of capacities (represented by the balance sheet), the saying "I am phantasy but I lack truth", and the fact that the female/moon/summer pillar retained any impressions made in it – a fact reflected in that, unlike what accountants call 'nominal' trading accounts, values on a balance sheet do not disappear, nor are they immutable.

Creating a currency matched to the Swiss franc enables the Society worldwide to operate above all national currencies. It can then 'see' its worldwide nature directly in its own accounts. For example, if we know there will be an event somewhere in the world we can use funds already held there, or else seek or generate them 'locally'.

This is not a complex matter; ask any foreign currency dealer. The difference is that the Hibernia currency is an *instrument for perceiving* the worldwide economy of the Anthroposophical Society/Movement, not a *means of profiting* from exchange rate differences. One can then see that 'markets' do not drive events; instead, one is led to discover or create the missing economic events that are behind any so-called exchange rate differences.

The Hibernia flows would be one-way – towards (or should that be from?) the future as it unfolds out of the will life, for which donations are perhaps the best medium. Exchange rates only become problems when the amount of money available for giving away is not enough to cover such events or when one expects money to come back – as is the case where economic affairs rely on lending.

In all this it may be that the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland is punching above its weight – the more so because, in conformity with Statute 12 of the Christmas Conference (Statute 4 in the 2002 legal document), it aims to remit the full amount due per member to the Goetheanum, something very few country societies currently do. But in finance, as in much else in life, things subtle have more significance than things gross. 'Leverage', for example, can be understood as financial 'homeopathy'. The parable of the widow's mite suggests 'etheric' effects. And then there is timing, world timing – as the far-sighted

industrialist and founder of the World Energy Council, Daniel Dunlop, might have put it.

Three final observations:

- 1) Were it to adopt the Hibernia, the Anthroposophical Society would stand 'free' of the Swiss franc. This would enable one to see more clearly the karma of locating the Goetheanum in a particular 'corner' of Europe currently known as Switzerland.
- 2) The risk of the Swiss franc being usurped by the euro would also become evident.
- 3) The fact that the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland straddles two countries would not be affected by 'Brexit'.

National currencies keep old habits and old enmities alive. They cannot be vehicles for the New Mysteries that underlie our times. 'Europa' refers to the community of humanity, not to a particular region on earth or a political bloc, still less the phenomenon of supernations and their currencies, for which the European Union and the euro are intended by their creators to be a forerunner. Nothing of this kind informs the Hibernia.



Rudolf Steiner.
Financial Genius.
July 2017

Concerning the financial travails of the Goetheanum, how sad that a mother should have to ask her daughters to feed her. And how unnecessary. Surely, Rudolf Steiner anticipated the financial dimensions of refounding the Society in 1923. Can we not heed his cues?

It should not surprise us that, when seen as a guide of humanity, an individuality of the standing of Rudolf Steiner should be something of a financial genius. Not in the superficial sense, but in the sense that an initiate of his stature would surely also know of what he speaks when it comes to finance. Not finance in today's narrow and largely self-interested sense, but finance as the reflection and enabler of human will. And this in turn as the outer expression of our karma, both as individuals and as humanity as a whole.

Steiner's genius is evident in his economics course, given in 1922 and a challenge to most – both those who took part and those who have dared to interpret it since. It is only nowadays, perhaps, that his contribution to economics is finding some recognition in that field proper. Not for the somewhat 'leftish' interpretation given it by some of Steiner's followers, or the purple tinge that others think it gives to market economics, but for the breadth of its technical understanding, ranging as it does from epistemology to practical policy.

Steiner's economics course teems with concepts and observations that leave conventional schools of economic thought in their wake. While theirs are the reification of ideologies, Steiner's economics course is a path for training the will, for managing unfolding karma. A light shone on the usually invisible field of our will life, allowing us to see, albeit indirectly, what lives there, what we have come to the earth to do, and whether we are learning the lessons of cohered, as opposed to unbridled, will, as also whether we know the truth of Christ's motto, "Nevertheless let Thy will be done."

In this brief eulogy, I want to draw attention to one instance in particular, the deep and seminal significance of which perhaps only future generations will come to understand, though it is meant for us today.

In 1923, when he refounded the Anthroposophical Society as the earthly vehicle of the School of Spiritual Science and the home in turn of Anthroposophia, Rudolf Steiner naturally gave expression to the financial dimension of that deed. So that good could become what from our hearts we would found, from our heads direct, and with our will give life.

Christmas Statute 12 reads: "Membership dues shall be fixed by the individual groups; each group shall, however, submit 15 Swiss Francs for each of its members to the central leadership of the Society at the Goetheanum." This, Steiner said, should be enough for the budget of the General Society. Updated using information supplied by the Swiss National Bank, that amount would now be 90 CHF per member¹⁰ – a factor of 6. Today, on the recently reported membership base of close on 45,000¹¹, this would amount to 4,050,000 CHF (or, as I prefer to think, 4,050,000 HIB – HIB

for Hibernias, a notional world currency rated 1:1 with the Swiss Franc that befits the need to think of the worldwide movement as the fullest context for the Goetheanum.¹²

In 2016 the cost for the Society and School combined was 14,944,000, of which 4,191,000 (28%) was met from membership contributions and free donations, meaning that *overall* we are actually already meeting the sum updated from 1923. We should know this and take heart from it. The problem is that it is not evenly, fairly or consciously carried by the membership at large.

On the other hand, this sum need not come from the members necessarily or directly. It is a levy that each group of the Society owes to the General Society. Naturally, Group Councils might look to their members to cover their obligations, both to their Group and to the worldwide Society, but not necessarily. They could seek out other sources of income, although Ghandi once said that the best form of financing for a society such as ours was regular amounts from individual human beings. Because every such act is one of renewed will and conscious intent, the will of the members should not be presumed or pressed upon. Its best effect arises when it is freely expressed, in this instance, as good will towards the Goetheanum – the financial counterpart, surely, of the intention "to nurture the life of the soul, both in the individual and in human society, on the basis of a true knowledge of the spiritual world." (See *Christmas Statute 1.*)

Steiner's genius lies in obliging the daughters (i.e. the local or subject matter Groups) to support their mother, but leaving them, and therefore the members in general, free as to how they meet their obligations. But there is more. Such a sum as 4,050,000 Hibernias not only meets the day-to-day needs of the Society, it could also have a siphoning or leveraging effect on the monies needed to finance the work of the School – the latter understood in its largest sense as ranging from stage work to research of all kinds in the many fields reflected in its Sections.

Likened to modern business precepts, membership income could be seen as covering the risk implicit in the work we initiate as a movement – the 'own capital' part of our liabilities, providing the ground that enables humanity at large to join us in financing the 'debt' part. Together, these two components finance our 'assets', namely, the contribution we make to humanity's spiritual and practical

¹⁰ Actually 94.

¹¹ Numbers from *Anthroposophy Worldwide*, Nr. 4/17.

¹² See *Anthroposophy Worldwide*, Nr. 3/17, p.16.

affairs on the ground of spiritual scientific insights (to allude to *Christmas Statute 2*). On 31 December 1923, when discussing how much money would be needed to finance the work of the School to the extent it merited, Steiner observed: "We should need nothing more than something like 50 to 75 million francs; [though] I present this not as a wish, nor as a possibility, only as an illusion, albeit a very real illusion. If we had 75 million francs, we should actually be able to do what absolutely must be done." Multiplied by the factor of 6, today this would be 300 to 450 million Hibernias.¹³

In that connection, the idea was also discussed at that time of a *World Goetheanum Association* (not to be confused with the currently proposed *Goetheanum Association*). This was not taken up, however, and the closest to it since is probably the *Goetheanum Fund*, currently an activity of the Swiss Society but originally conceived as (and still capable of being) a concept for each and every country society. Worldwide, yet variegated; not a global organisation.

If every society did in fact seek support for the work of the School from society at large, not only would that work be strengthened and protected, because its relevance and merit would have been recognised by people generally, but the 450,000,000 Hibernias would also arise on a *worldwide* basis – that is to say, not in one place but wherever the inner Goetheanum was active. In 2016 terms, that would mean the current 10,750,000 for the Goetheanum at Dornach plus 439,250,000 for the Goetheanum beyond Dornach, with a large part of this probably coming from 'spend-out' foundations¹⁴, where this money currently otherwise gets 'stocked' in financial markets.

This would be crowd-funding like no other! The question is whether the Anthroposophical Movement has reached the necessary maturity. Whether the Vorstand is prepared to oblige the groups of the Society. Whether in turn those responsible for the Groups (their Councils) are ready, willing and able to meet their obligations to the General Society. And whether the members can deepen their goodwill towards

¹³ Cast over the 10,000 institutions worldwide, this would be 45,000 per institution. As an economic calculation, but not as a policy proposal, it would be interesting to know what that would be as a percentage of their turnover; that is, as if they were charged an intellectual property levy. Conversely, and more interestingly, it would be valuable to know by what amount, if any, their income would need to increase in order to contribute such a sum.

¹⁴ Foundations that give away not only their interest, but overtime their capital also.

the Goetheanum. But above all, whether it is now possible for people to see "that fruitful work can be done out of Anthroposophy [such that] it might be possible to say to them: ...maybe you are not interested now, but help us get it going and show what it can do." (Rudolf Steiner speaking on 1 January 1924.)

The answer to these questions – questions of leverage and world relevance, rather than addition and self-referencing – cannot be known, however, until the 90 per member is achieved. Currently that amount averages a very uneven 75. Can we, therefore, find it in our hearts and will to increase this number, but also to carry it more widely? Surely the Good Spirits that accompanied the Christmas Conference would not let such an effort on our part go unnoticed or unreciprocated.

Threefold Ireland?

May 2018

At the recent Inis Mor gathering, effectively a gathering of researchers, the relationship between Ireland and Hibernia was explored. This was done through a series of rich tableaux out of which various themes arose, notably whether it was permissible to wreath the sun cross in red roses.

Related to it, but more down to earth, was a set of questions that I as treasurer in a foreign land, so to speak, have been pondering for some time. The first question is straightforward enough: *Are Ireland and Hibernia synonymous today? Or were they before the island became riven by its long and various histories? Or might they become so in the future?*

The second is more complex. According to the intentions of its founders and as stated in its constitution, when the Anthroposophical Society became established in Ireland in 1989 it embraced the whole island. If this is not to be a naive sentiment, but a social and even spiritual fact, it needs to be given more than ideal expression. Indeed, if we are to be able to ground this image in financial and juridical fact, our little affair may yet provide a steer for life on the island more widely, orienting it to a true unity (assuming that is what the gods have in mind).

During our gathering the proprietor of the local café, asked me who we were. Not knowing the cultural context of the locality (Inis Mor) and not wishing to embarrass anyone, I replied: "We are Hibernia historians, looking back in order to see forward." This was not me denying

anthroposophy in any way, but replying professionally as an historian. But also truthfully because I feel we have a duty to look at history using the same symptomological approach taken by Rudolf Steiner, whereby events on earth are the tips, as it were, of upside-down, gaseous 'icebergs'.

In that sense, synonymous or not, Hibernia hovers over Ireland as its explicator. It was in this sense that I created the Hibernia currency to be above the euro and the pound as a reminder that, while the Anthroposophical Society may be *in* two jurisdictions and use two currencies, it is not of either.

This underpins my second question: *Often when I listen to discussions on Irishness – the use of Gaelic, Irish ballads, the melancholia of the diaspora, and so on – I feel a huge bias in favour of the Republic and wonder, outside of our own circles there, how this resonates in Northern Ireland. Am I right in perceiving such a bias? Is there in fact a sense of Irishness that belongs to the whole island?*

The question arises in part because the Inis Mor gathering coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Part of this 'event' entails the idea of unification, concerning which Arlene Foster, current leader of the DUP and with a whip hand on the UK government, said if Ireland were unified she would probably move away. What is the reality, therefore, of the idea of unification?

My third question is the following: *Without giving details, someone at the gathering spoke of a threefold understanding of Ireland. What is this idea? Has it been researched? What does it entail? Does it have practical reality?*

I ask this question for general and specific reasons. Generally, because such an image ought to be in the public domain as a conscious contribution to history. Specifically, because as a small unincorporated association in a time of increasing regulation, the world will one day ask to which jurisdiction we belong – the Republic or Northern Ireland? And in a year or so that will entail the further question – the United Kingdom or the European Union?

If that answer is to remain "neither but both", if we really are to belong to the island as a whole, perhaps with the nickname Hibernia, how is the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland to continue to be unincorporated and not registered for charitable (i.e. tax exemption) purposes or any other?

This may seem to be an obtuse consideration, but it is linked to some important concerns.

Firstly, in such an association the law has recourse to those responsible for its governance, i.e. the individual members of the Council, of whom the law expects due diligence in regard to the conduct of its affairs. In part, incorporation protects Council members from such responsibility directly, but the real protection comes from being able to account clearly for one's use of money, especially being able to show that one's finances are tied to 'public benefit'.

But that is not all. In addition to clear and up-to-date accounts, one needs to minimise the holding of real assets (buildings, etc.), as also funds held for which there is no clear or stated purpose. In other words, the more one can depend on income and available cash, the more one's protection is 'in-built'. For then, when subject to any audit, one will not only be able to evidence one's transactions fully (including the necessary documentation), but the transactions will also be those of an organisation that serves the needs of the times and is supported by the will of its members; instead of one that has become enmeshed in all the complications – both inner and outer – that real assets and abstract deposits of capital often seem necessarily to entail.

In short, by conducting the finances of the Anthroposophical Society in Ireland on this basis my aim is specific: the simpler our affairs, the more substantial will be the reality behind them. That, in fact, is the reason why I am asking these three questions.

