

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH

COMMUNITY FARM NEWS Winter '04

Progress at Plaw Hatch

This has been a year of stabilisation, consolidation and increasing economic profitability. If I cast my mind back to a year ago, when the farm's future – not least as a biodynamic farm – seemed under threat because of ingrained social and financial problems, it is nothing short of a joy to be able to report that quiet but solid progress has been made and is being maintained on all fronts.

Financial performance is now consistently above budget, implying a turn-round of the farm's financial fortunes, and while it cannot be claimed that everyone now agrees about everything, all the members of the farm and garden team are not only still there but are endeavouring to work more closely together. This is a tremendous tribute to all those working on the farm.

One contributory factor to this picture has been the welcome addition to the Management Group of three individuals, each of whom has brought an essential element to the farm. Krista Braun joined us early in 2003 to help guide the biodynamic work and advise on teambuilding issues. Later we were joined by Mike Eichner and Patrick Shaw. Mike's business experience has already done much to support and give confidence to the directors (Jonathan, Kate and myself) in assessing what is going on financially and planning for the future; Patrick, who will be familiar to many as the initiator of Future Cycles, has not only become a very skilled yoghurt (etc) maker, but has made an invaluable contribution on the personnel front, and also with market research on dairy products.

Mention should also be made of a fourth individual whose arrival strengthens the biodynamic aspect of the farm. Peter Brinch previously spent many years associated with the farm but left the area a few years ago to work with the BD Seed Development Initiative at Botton Village, subsequently moving to Stroud, where he became more fully linked with the BDAA. He then asked if he could return to the farm and use it as a base for his ongoing BD seed development work, a request which was granted by Tom giving him a

suitable piece of land and by Tom and Julia agreeing to a flat being created for him in their house.

On the basis of this increased stability, work is now actively going ahead to implement plans to create a new entrance for the farm which will be safer for customers of the now expanded shop. This is of course a major project for the farm, requiring the skills of Mike Eichner to manage and the financial support of St Anthony's Trust (the owner of the land and buildings). The Trust is also supporting maintenance and improvement works on the – in some cases – somewhat dilapidated living accommodation around the farm. Additional impulses on the development and maintenance front include refurbishment work on the spring and forestry/woodcraft projects, in both of which areas the students from Pericles have made – and will continue to make – an important contribution.

Work has also been done over the past year to re-establish the farm as a local educational resource in BD agriculture. This had been placed in jeopardy by the withdrawal in late 2002 of the Emerson College students and then by some difficulties experienced during visits of some classes from Michael Hall. The latter problems have now been resolved, while the farm/garden team and the Management Group actively look forward to resumption of use by the Emerson College students of the facilities on offer. This area of education and training is of great importance both for the Management Group and for the Trust.

Much work remains to be done. Nevertheless, it is the conviction of every member of what I may in this context refer to as the Plaw Hatch community that there is a united goal of great value to be striven for and that further steps towards its achievement can and will be made over the coming year.

Simon Blaxland de Lange

Chairman of the Management Group

Future of the Co-op

Two meetings have taken place recently at which the future direction of the Co-op was explored. The first, in October, was a one day seminar led by Traugher Groh, a biodynamic farmer who has been running a successful community supported farm in America for many years. With assistance from Traugher and from Greg Pilley of the Soil Association, we obtained an invaluable insight into the diverse approaches to community supported agriculture being practised elsewhere in the UK and beyond. Building on this, the meeting went on to explore some of the fundamental issues facing our own Co-op and farms today.

The second meeting took place in January, and was organised by the Co-op for an invited group of individuals who have played or are playing significant roles in the development of the farms and the Co-op. This meeting looked back in some detail at the events of the last 35 years since biodynamic farming began at Tablehurst Farm in 1968. We considered how and why the Co-op had been formed, and explored the ownership and management arrangements currently in place and the present health – agriculturally, socially and commercially – of our enterprises. The meeting went on to consider the future of the farms and the Co-op and to develop ideas on how the overall initiative should go forward. Brian Swain, the Co-op Chairman, advised the meeting that this was the first stage in a process of consultation and development of ideas that is expected to stretch over the next several months. Accordingly, the ideas articulated at the meeting will now be passed back to the Co-op committee for further development.

If you are not yet a Co-op shareholder, by far the best time to join is *now*. We are extremely keen to widen the community of individuals who have a personal stake in our farms and our future. Please just complete the application form below. A copy will do just as well.

Farm Study Group

For the last 18 months, a small group of us, typically six to eight people, have been meeting fortnightly to study texts relating to community supported agriculture and biodynamic farming. Recently, we have been considering lectures by Manfred Klett, whose work helped to inspire the formation of our Co-op. We are about to start reading Rudolf Steiner's writings on the threefold social order.

From a personal point of view, I find the study group relaxed, enjoyable, stimulating and thought-provoking. The group is open, and we would welcome new members. If you think you might be interested in joining us, please contact either me (822611) or Peter or Brigitte Brown (823260) for more information.

Chris Marshall

SHARE APPLICATION

I would formally like to apply to become a member of TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETY (No 28403R) and enclose:

A cheque for £ to buy share(s) at £100 each

Please make your cheque payable to Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Ltd and send to:

The Secretary, Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Ltd, 15 Stonepark Drive, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5DG.

Full name..... Signature.....

Address

Telephone no..... Date.....

Cancer: Challenge and Chance

There it was: the glove by my feet.
And the words thrown with it
Echoed and echoed
Until my whole being was filled with echoing sound.
And there he stood: the challenger.
Clad in black armour, sitting on a black steed.
No face, no eyes, unrelenting.
What were the words he said?
Did anyone hear?
Are there witnesses?
Slowly they come to me, the ancient old words
Of lonely challenge
Slowly and solemn: Know. Your. Self.
I pick up the glove: throw it high in the air
And it changes into a golden falcon circling above.
The eyes of my genius light up.
"Every challenge a chance."
My armour is brought, fashioned by demons and angels.
The steed? A yearling, barely broken in, but of good lineage.
The time: now. The place: right here.
He charges.
And with every blow there is more I know
And with every defeat he grows stronger, my steed.
The expanse and depth of this field unmeasured –
The vast battleground of the soul.
Between demons and angels
The challenger charges
Man to become truly man.
He has many names.

Brigitte Brown

I would like to thank you all, who sent kind words
of strength giving support and helped generously.

Tablehurst Farmers Notebook

Things are a bit more relaxed on the farm at this time of year than at any other. That makes up for the very busy time for all up to Christmas, especially for the shop team. They were still busy on Christmas Eve at 5 o'clock when friends and visitors arrived to sing carols with us to all the farm animals. There is a legend that tells how at midnight each year on Christmas Eve, when Christ was born, man and animal are able to understand one another. We therefore read to the animals the bible about Christ's birth in the stable, only we have moved it forward to 5 o'clock. This is so that families with their children can join us in experiencing and acknowledging the animals as we go from barn to barn singing. As in other years, we ended up in the sheep barn with hot juice and mince pies for all.

It is very gratifying for us to receive the feedback of so many happy customers after the Christmas period and no complaints. It says a lot of the high standard set by Barry and the team in the shop.

In December we also received the first 'in conversion' subsidies for the new 200 acres, which relieved the slightly tight cash flow situation towards Christmas. On **Sunday March 21st** we will have a farm walk taking those of you who would like to join us over the new land. Lambing will also just have started so there should be something to see there too. We had the flock scanned showing 2 not in lamb, 41 singles, 102 twins, 20 triplets and 3 quads which equals 188% for the 168 ewes. Not too bad, but we would have been happier with more twins and fewer singles. What will really count, of course, is how many live, healthy lambs we have a few weeks after lambing!

Farm Concert

Sunday 14th March, 8pm
Long Room, Michael Hall



Dorothea Leber, Diane Howard,
Elizabeth Edwards, Shereen Godber,
Elizabeth Porterfield, & Sylvia Trench
will sing and play a colourful programme
of music dedicated to our land and what
lives on and in it.

Tickets £5, concessions £4

This year, proceeds will go to Tablehurst Farm

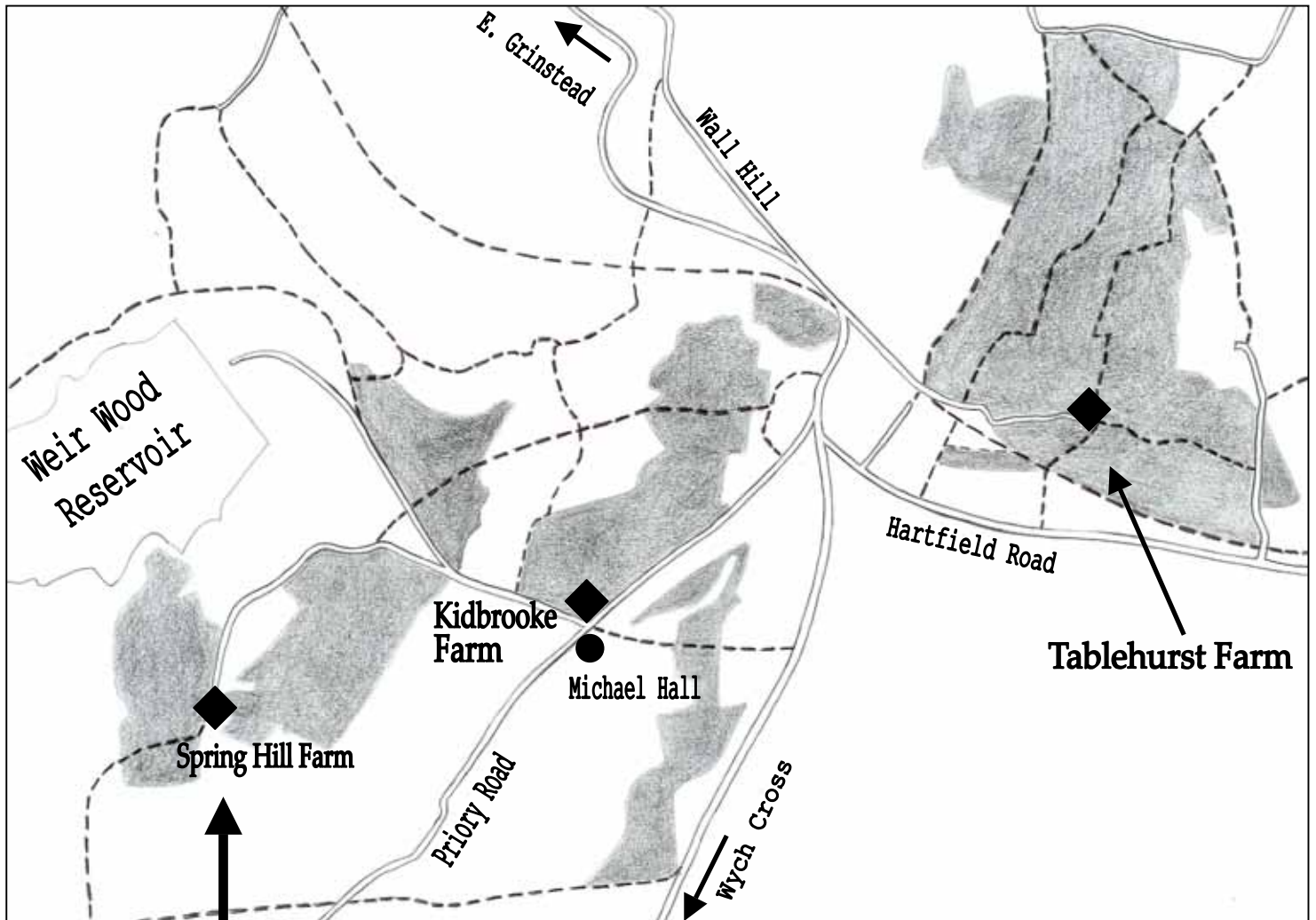
Six of the new cows that we bought with calves at foot, last year, have also calved during January. It is nice to have such early calves as most of our cows only calve later. At Kidbrooke twelve of the thirteen heifers which we put to the bull are in calf and are due in a couple of months.

Through FWAG we are submitting an application to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Brambletye Field and Springhill Farm to plant some hedges and put up fences to protect them. We also want to put in two small 'scrapes' or small shallow ponds for the wildlife and have some margins around the arable fields. We hope the application will be successful as it will help considerably with the costs.

I am now in the lucky position of having a farm team who I can leave the farm to for the next month while Brigitte and I first go to the large annual Biodynamic conference in Switzerland and then to some sea and sun in Lanzarote for a couple of weeks. One has to take the chance when one can!

Peter Brown

Tablehurst Farm is growing ...



Walk the new land

Farm walk

Sunday March 21st at 2.30pm

Meet at Spring Hill Farm

Take the reservoir road opposite Michael Hall School, bear left at the fork after $\frac{1}{4}$ mile and continue for about another $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. Bring your wellies.

Tablehurst Farm has recently entered into agreements to rent a further 200 acres of land, predominantly at Kidbrooke Farm and Spring Hill Farm. The land will be converted to biodynamic standards.

This expansion will allow a major increase in the size of the cattle herd, so that the farm can supply all the beef for the farm shop, and an increase in the acreage of arable crops, mainly for animal feed.

The map above shows (shaded) all the land now under the management of Tablehurst Farm.

Michael Hall Garden News

It's January, there even is a dusting of snow covering the garden. Still, indoors, with slight heat, "spring" has started: lettuce, spinach, salad greens are growing there, to be transplanted into the poly tunnels in February. There are things to be picked, even at this time of year: sugarloaf, leeks, parsnips, scartonera, chervil, parsley, salad greens, and most amazing is the winter purslane, which just keeps growing even in the frosty weather.

I look forward to the year with quite a bit of apprehension: how with things grow? How will I manage the mountains of work? Will there be the usual demand for vegetables? Will the weather be kind? But I also look forward to the chance of doing things better than last year. There are notes in my garden plan like "more mooli", "water beetroot seedlings if it's dry", "spray Equisitum more often". In my mind's eye, I see beautiful flowers in both herbaceous borders. (That really is a question of time more than anything else.)

This year is going to be different from last year. First of all David Freiburg has joined me as a colleague in the garden, nearly full time. It's wonderful to not do everything myself and it makes holidays possible. Secondly, I have moved out of "the caravan" and now live in Shaw Cottage at the south wall of the garden.

The glasshouses are getting very old and need to be replaced. The biggest job will be to take them down, I think.



I'm still living with my couch grass, *agropyron repens*. I recently bought some couch grass root for a tea, nicely cleaned, cut and dried, and I thought if I could just sell all mine, the garden would be rich. I'm trying a "pepper" - a preparation made out of burnt couch grass seed, to give it the message to not take over here. One has to apply it regularly over a number of years.

I'm still hoping to write a garden notebook one day, with recipes for all the vegetables I grow and dressings and sauces to go with it. I'd also like to sell more plants this year, especially some herbs (basil, parsley) in pots.

Dorothea Leber

Milk and (Spring) Water

"The spring never dries up", so everyone kept saying to me! Well, it hasn't, but this last summer, the flow got to such low levels that we were forced to switch the farm water onto the mains supply.

All the livestock on the farm drank the spring water. We did also, as did hundreds of other shop customers. The change was quite dramatic: we didn't enjoy the taste of the mains water, the cows with their long noses sniffed at it, and a lot of bemused customers were forced to source quality water elsewhere.

A lot of people have asked me whether it has affected the cows and the milk. Well, I do not have the best palate or sense of smell to tell much difference, but if you think that 88% of milk is water, the surely the richness must be affected.

Another impact is to our pockets. The average cow (if there is one) drinks about 60 litres of water per day. That's 3000 litres per day for the cows, plus we use a lot for washing down the milking parlour and other seemingly wasteful tasks.

All is not lost though. The cows are in good shape for the winter. We have had an opportunity to examine the dilapidated Victorian spring water system and plan not only to improve the flow but also to make a cleaner supply. I certainly won't take the spring water so much for granted in the future.

Best wishes and I hope you continue to enjoy all our dairy produce.

Tom Ventham

Renovating the Spring

As some of you who enjoy the water know, the farm is fortunate enough to have a viable spring with underground storage. The spring system must be at least 100 years old and is used to provide water to Plaw Hatch Hall, Dodges Farm and surrounding houses by means of a hydraulic pump. These days the pump is powered by electricity and the water is piped all over the farm.

The spring is a vital resource for the farm providing chemical-free pure Sussex water for all the animals and garden irrigation for the people within the community on and off the farm.

Since August there has been no spring water available. The spring has not failed but is in need of some TLC in the form of maintenance which has been neglected over the last few years. The collection point which is a brick "well" has silted up and this needs to be dug out, lined with geotextile and partially filled with a filter medium such as clinker.

There is also maintenance work required to the pumphouse which is in desperate need of a new roof and some pipe work needs upgrading and replacing. This needs to be carried out together

with some field drainage work in the area to prevent any runoff into the well.

The farm has a licence from the water authority to extract water and when the water is not available we have to use mains water, at a significant cost to the business.

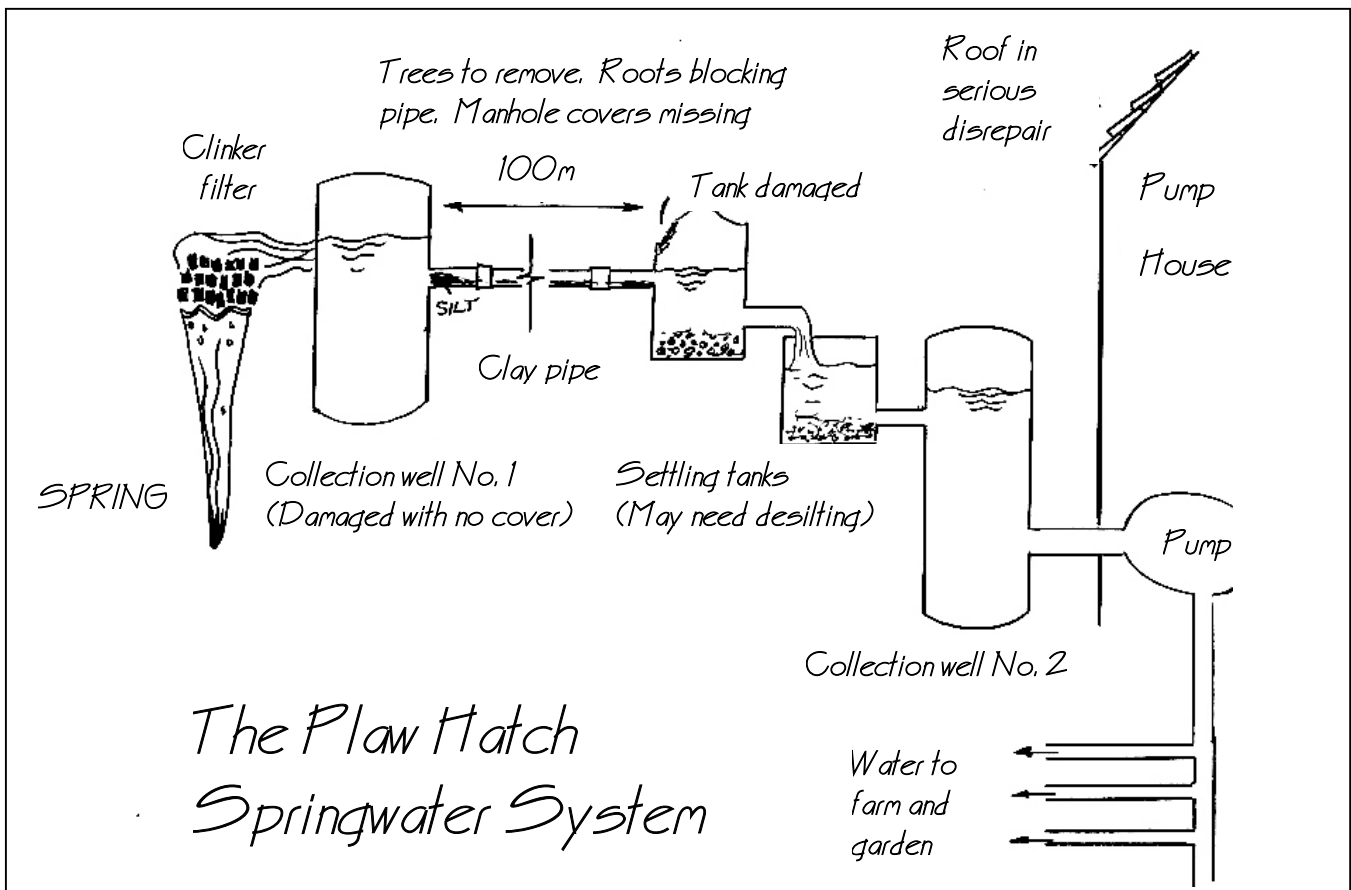
We are going to proceed with works to the well within the next month, weather permitting, and will plan the other works as funds become available.

We would like to thank all of you who have contributed with donations in the past and encourage you to do so in the future to help in the upkeep of our system. We are sure that many of you who have had to buy spring water this autumn will appreciate in financial terms the value of the special resource and recognise the increasing importance of pure water in our modern world.

We will keep you posted!

Recommended reading: Sensitive Chaos by Thodor Schwenk (Rudolf Steiner Press) and Blue Gold by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke (The New Press, www.thenewpress.com)

Ray Jones and Serena Evans



Bottle Biz

We're still haemorrhaging (vitrorrhaging?) milk bottles. Every week we have to break out three to six crates of new ones. At 35p a bottle, that's £20 to £40 a week, an unfair burden for a (very) non-corporate enterprise like ours. So don't be fooled by the packaging! To us these aren't the near-invisibles they may seem with your big milk suppliers. They're roaming satellites of the farm. (Which planet is that? Mercury probably!) So send those little bodies back to their natural sun.

On the subject of lost bodies and bottles: found inside one of the latter was one of the former, a little knitted figure, black with a yellow hat. Is this someone's talisman? It's super-clean now and can be reclaimed from me!

Andy

Newsletter News

Our plan in future is to distribute the Co-op newsletter as follows:

- All Co-op shareholders will be sent a copy to their home address (but see below)
- Co-op shareholders can elect to receive the newsletter by email, or to pick a copy up at one of the farm shops. Both of these options save us money, so let us know if either of them suit you.
- We will email the newsletter to anybody on receipt of an email address. However, we will not generally post copies to non-shareholders
- Copies will be available in both farm shops and The Seasons

Please let us know if we have an incorrect address for you - I am making a huge effort now to correct all the errors in our database once and for all! Please also let me know if you would prefer not to hear from us any more.

Chris Marshall

Permanent culture at Plaw Hatch

On the 12th-13th July we had a Permaculture introduction weekend on the farm. Permaculture is an ecological design process. It means that in designing a system (garden, home, or anything in life) we try to integrate as many elements as possible in order to create beneficial support, just like in nature; plants support each other, animals feed on plants and insects, plants feed on animals' excretions and more...

During the course we explored the possibilities of integrating Biodynamic farming and Permaculture. We found that the spiritual background of Biodynamic agriculture isn't contradicted by the Permaculture methods, but further they enhance each other.

Now following the successful course in July we will have a FULL PERMACULTURE DESIGN COURSE on the farm for 2 weeks in June 2004. so get ready for it....

For more information please contact: Nir Halfon 01444 831466



Farm Walk

Old Plaw Hatch Farm

Sunday 15th Feb, 2.30pm

Everybody welcome

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