

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH

COMMUNITY FARM NEWS SPRING '04

Old Plaw Hatch Garden

This is now our seventh season here and looking back on what has happened in the garden it seems it has grown steadily despite the ups and downs the farm has gone through during that time. When we arrived the garden was in effect not much more than an open field, with a few polytunnels, an old chicken shed with an earth floor and a tap in one corner of the field. So there was a huge challenge in the first years to improve the infrastructure with a rabbit fence, install water storage for the spring water and irrigation, improve and increase the protected cropping and organise propagating areas. We came with the same ethos that we had at Michael Hall to produce good quality bio-dynamic vegetables at realistic prices for as long a season as we could, for direct local market. Coming to the farm gave us the opportunity to go that bit further to increase our production with a larger area and mechanisation of some of the work.

The garden area at the beginning was a total of about 8 acres and with expansion over time, first into the Bee Field adjacent to the main track and the Old Fruit Field and then Toll Field across the road, it is now more like 14 acres. The area of polytunnels has also increased by about two thirds. We are now looking again for land in the close vicinity to convert to bio-dynamic status to double the area again. This is due to the truly positive situation that we find ourselves in; from a beginning of selling two thirds of the garden produce to wholesalers and off the farm we are now selling 99% through the farm shop itself, and still falling far short of meeting the demand. With more land we could work further to meet that.

As for the practical operation, the garden has two outdoor rotations with 20% of each down to a green manure of clover and rye grass which remain for 12 -18 months and then a separate rotation in the polytunnels. Cow manure and compost is spread on specific areas of each rotation on an annual basis. This combined is the basis of our fertility. The ground is cultivated at different times throughout the year depending what crops are there and what crops will follow. Spraying of preparation 500 is carried out in the spring and again in autumn. The polytunnels are worked intensively year round and extend production in the early and late times of the year.

We start propagating in mid winter with heated areas in the small tunnels, then the plants move to cooler tunnels to acclimatise, and finally they are hardened off outside if they are outdoor crops. We raise all our plants ourselves from seed. Planting is mostly done by hand though we now have a tractor mounted module planter, potato planter and leek dibber (which makes the holes) and are looking for a block planting machine for the future. We are continually experimenting with the undersowing of some crops to both conserve and build soil fertility using different legumes and cereals. Weed control is now largely done by machine and we are increasing our use of bio-degradable com-starch mulches outside and re-usable ground covers in the poly-tunnels to suppress weed growth and conserve soil moisture, drastically reducing water use and the workload at peak times. Spraying of preparation 501 is done on a monthly basis through peak times and as necessary in the quieter times of the year as the crops reach maturity. Harvesting is constant throughout the year but reaches a high point in the early autumn. Although hugely labour intensive, we choose to pick on a daily basis in the early morning for most of the crops so they hold their vitality and are as fresh as possible as we believe this makes all the difference.

We are at last establishing more hedges and flower areas around the garden and we leave the scrubber areas to themselves for the nettles, brambles and wayside plants for the diversity and health of the garden and its surrounds.

Kate Munden

Letter from the Co-op Chairman

I will try to write a letter each newsletter to give a view of the Co-op as a community based Co-operative that owns and supports two farm enterprises. Each of the farms will be giving their individual updates, while our editor, Chris Marshall will provide a variety of Co-op and Farms' related news and comment.

We have seen much change in the last year since I found myself in the role of chairman of an organisation in crisis. At that time it was the agreed focus of the Committee that we needed to help foster stability within the Co-op. In a great sense our input has been small other than visibly standing with the farm management teams in their purpose, work and relationship to the Co-op community.

It is bringing stability into the Co-op and the farms that is still the key focus for the committee. In this context one aspect of our attention has been taken up with the transfer of Tablehurst Farm ownership from Emerson College to St. Anthony's Trust. This process has been going on for sometime but it is quite important now that it be completed so that we can bring the ownership of the farm land and buildings under a single ownership body, wholly dedicated to the support of Biodynamic Farming. When this transfer is completed we will then have a tripartite structure of the Co-op owning the businesses, the Trust owning the land and the individual farms with management and staff operating the enterprises. This stability of ownership and identity is quite important for the next steps in the Co-op's and the farms' future.

Bringing stability to all aspects of the Co-op is quite a task and will take a number of years to establish both a dynamic and a sustainable community enterprise. One next step needs to be a drive for new members for the Co-op. This growth is key because the Co-op relies on the active participation and support of its membership - who identify the farms as an essential element in the

fabric of their lives and the life of their community.

Presently we have 380 members. Recently it has been identified that only a small proportion of the customers of the farms are Co-op members. A rough conservative estimate indicates that there are potentially 500 more members from our community of customers, who could be interested in membership. In the next few months we will begin a defined programme of canvassing for members from the known customer community.

This drive for membership will also be the leading edge of a renewed fundraising effort. Many times, throughout the history of the Co-op and the farms, the community has been called on to bailout and prop-up ailing farms. This is not the case now. On both farms there are very specific development projects that require capital to build up the fabric of buildings, facilities and land that will make the businesses and the farm environments more effective and attractive.

As I have said, we are quite a way from a truly sustainable and stable configuration of people, facilities, land and businesses but we are clearly on the right path. I think and feel that we are in a position to create a sustainable, operating model of community-supported agriculture that is based on the quality of the products that we produce, the experience people have during purchase, the physical, natural environment of the farms and the freedom of people to choose this for themselves.

If we can achieve this, we will have a wonderful asset in our community and a gift of proof that such things are possible for communities throughout the UK and beyond. I enjoin you all to join us in making the next steps of the Co-op the success that they can be.

Brian Swain, Chairman, Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm

Join our community of farm owners - see page 5

A Small Price to Pay

I often think how lucky I am to live in Forest Row. I am able to buy really good food, grown in harmony with the cosmos, free from pesticide residues and harm to the environment. Production and consumption where possible remaining local means less road and air miles too. And even more, by buying the food and through Co-op membership I participate in an affiliation of people who care about these things.

But of course there is a social dimension beyond all this. The death of 19 cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in January drew attention to a very worrying aspect of how food reaches our plates. On the occasions when I do resort to the supermarket, I have found myself looking at the neatly packed vegetables and fruit, and thinking, "how does this stuff get here, who picks it, processes and packs it? I imagine teams of workers in fields and warehouses, noisy machines, people on piece-work, wading through endless piles of food, for our enjoyment, not theirs. They are sure to be on very low wages. Perhaps they are failed asylum seekers; at any rate they are people outside our own "comfort zone". It's not much fun thinking like this; it brings all that third world /first world imbalance uncomfortably close.

An article in the Observer, (15th Feb 2004), mentions some of the factors at work. Most migrant workers in this country are employed in agriculture, (many in Sussex as it happens), and the article quotes one of the so called gang masters laying some of the blame on the ruthless price cutting of supermarkets; (so what's new?) And it's obvious that the workers themselves, because of their circumstances, are vulnerable to this pressure and just the sort of exploitation and tragedy which befell the cockle pickers.

A supposed justification for not shopping at the supermarket is that it avoids contributing to this ugly side of the economy. We would prefer a more "ethical" approach. But I don't think this really gets us off the hook. For one thing it's very hard to be completely "ethical" in one's consuming or even know quite what ethical means here. But more simply these people are here. When events like the one in Morecambe Bay occur we can't avoid their presence in our consciousness even if we want to. They come here to share in our good fortune, (and contribute to it), and, here or "back home", they are part of the human family. In a completely unpatronising way we just wish that their situation could be different.

I think most people who shop at Plaw Hatch or Tablehurst, The Seasons or Michael Hall garden are grateful. And even if we avoid the the supermarket we might still be pleased that, responding to consumer pressure, they have introduced more organic and fair trade produce in recent years. A common factor in both cases is people being willing to pay a higher price. If people pay more for this kind of food they do it among other reasons because they hope it will contribute to a fairer distribution of wealth. And I believe implicit in this is the idea that a society which shares what it has gets much more back than any amount of price cutting can give it. An individualistic culture can easily forget that social cohesion and justice are the much needed rewards of this impulse to share. The extent to which we loose these things is the extent to which we loose real democracy because democracy relies at its core on this kind of mutual respect. There *is* a connection between this idea, and the death of those Cockle pickers and the price they and their families paid, and our willingness or not to pay the real price for our food. If the idea of a Co-op like ours has meaning for me it is that it affirms the significance of this link. We don't exist within a bubble.



Mark Haughton

St Anthony's Trust - Out of the Shadows

During my early years in Forest Row I sometimes heard tell of a body known as "St Anthony's". Nobody seemed to know much about it, although it seemed to be shadowy but powerful. So I mentally bracketed it with the Mafia and the Freemasons, and gave it no further thought. Some years later I found myself caught off guard and, before I knew what had happened, I was signed up as a trustee of what I now know to be "St Anthony's Charitable Trust". Since then I have found that my own earlier perception is still widely held. So this is a chance to put on the record what St Anthony's really is.

St Anthony's was founded in 1972. The original trustees were Warren Ashe, Bob Wills, William Mann and Daniel Donahaye. The first two are still in post some 32 years later. The charitable purposes of the Trust were initially "the advancement of education (with particular regard to the principles and methods based on the teaching of Rudolf Steiner)" and "the relief of the aged impotent and poor". Soon after, these purposes were extended to include "the establishment and running of agricultural and horticultural training centres based on bio-dynamic agricultural techniques" and a range of associated purposes to do with training and education in biodynamic agriculture. Although the Trust has continued to pursue all its charitable objectives it is in the field of bio-dynamic agriculture that it has been most prominent in recent years.

St Anthony's was central to the beginnings of community agriculture in the Forest Row area. In 1980 the Trust launched a wide public appeal for funds to buy Old Plaw Hatch Farm, which had been farmed bio-dynamically under private ownership. A large community support group was formed, the farm was bought, and the continuity of the local milk round, the supply of bio-dynamic produce, and the training of young farmers was secured.

St Anthony's owned both the farm land and the farm business until the business was transferred to the Co-op some three years ago. St Anthony's still owns the farm land

and buildings and its relationship to the farm business is that of landlord to tenant. In its role as landlord, the Trust is striving to improve the infrastructure. In particular the Trustees are keen to see the new entrance completed to create a safer and more attractive access to the farm and farm shop.

When the Co-op was formed and became the owner of the Tablehurst Farm business, Emerson College, the owners of the farm, indicated they wished to transfer the land and buildings to St Anthony's. Effecting this transfer has proved quite difficult in practice, but it should soon be completed. This will extend the role of St Anthony's in ensuring that these invaluable farms can continue to be farmed bio-dynamically in perpetuity.

Lastly, but by no means least, mention should be made of Seasons. When the original founder of Seasons was leaving Forest Row, she wished to pass the shop to the community. Once again, St Anthony's was a convenient legal entity to take on the ownership of the business (but not unfortunately the premises). Although St Anthony's owns the Seasons, the actual running of the business is left in the hands of the directors.

St Anthony's is funded almost entirely by donations. While we have only rarely engaged in active fund-raising, we have been fortunate to receive gifts and legacies that have arrived just when they are most needed. It is clear that especially in the area of local biodynamic and community agriculture Forest Row occupies a unique position in the UK. Huge opportunities remain to be exploited. The Trustees of St Anthony's look forward to engaging with the farms, the Coop and the wider community in helping build the future. All the Trustees, Bob and Warren already mentioned, plus Simon Blaxland de Lange and myself are always willing to talk about the Trust with anyone who is interested.

Paul Shanahan - tel 01825 712060 daytimes, email paul@gregory-harland.co.uk

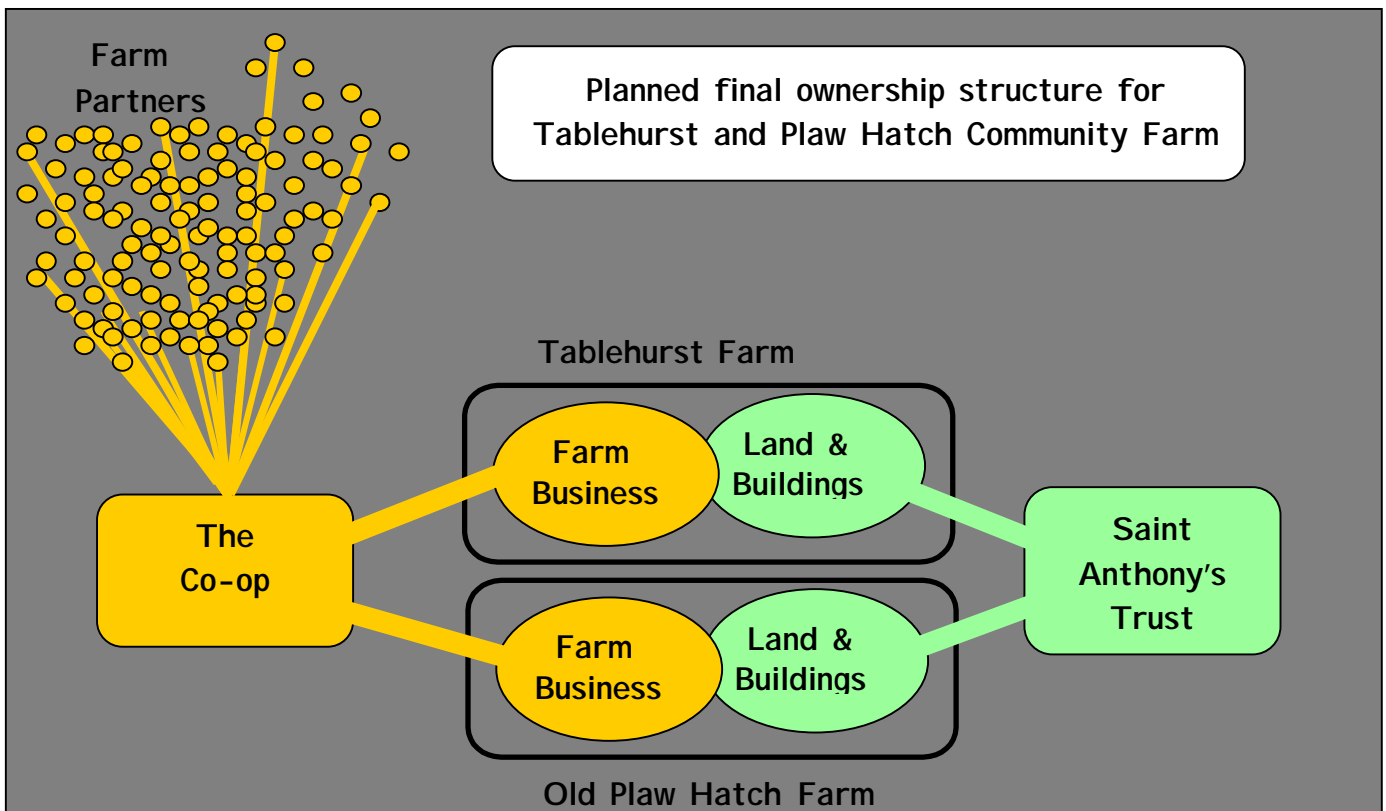
We need more farm partners - apply today ...

Q. Who owns Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms? A. You?

The ownership arrangements that have been adopted for our two farms look rather complicated on first acquaintance, but they do actually make sense. In each case, the land and buildings are in the hands of a charitable trust - thereby permitting charitable giving to be channelled to our initiative and helping to protect the farms' assets in perpetuity in the event that either of the businesses should fail. Currently, Tablehurst Farm is owned by Emerson College Trust and Plaw Hatch by St Anthony's Trust. However, a process is underway to transfer Tablehurst to St Anthony's, thus unifying ownership of the two farms.

The farm businesses are both owned by "the Co-op", which is an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS). This is a form of legal entity similar to a company in that it is owned by shareholders, but different from a company in that every shareholder has an equal say regardless of how many shares they own. This prevents a single individual or group from securing control of the Co-op by buying lots of shares, and thus ensures dispersed community ownership for as long as the farm businesses continue to operate.

Finally, the Co-op is owned by its shareholders, who are all private individuals in the community. These individuals, known as "farm partners" are ultimately the *only* owners of the two farm businesses. You too can become a farm partner - just fill in the form below to apply.



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.....

AddressPostcode

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

Eighty (80!) Farmers' Wives

Yes, eighty farmers' wives and women working on the land met late last year on the Bauckhof in Amelinghausen in North Germany. The vibrancy, inner strength, dedication and warmth still resonate in me. In thirty years, it was apparently the first time that two women from England participated - Krista Braun and myself, though Krista participated often when she was farming in Switzerland. Thirty years ago, it was decided that once a year, it should be the farmers' wives' turn to leave all their obligations (1,2,3,4,5 ... kids, husband, cooking for the farm team, veg garden, herbal preparations, farm shop, cowshed, office, apprentices, organizing festivals ...) and meet with others to share, study, deepen their understanding of bio-dynamics, find new inspiration and strength to embrace all that a farmer's wife embraces on a farm.

Some of the initiators, among them Maria Thun (whose bio-dynamic planting calendar has become world famous) were with us. Ages ranged from 22 to 80! The introduction of every one on the first evening set the tune. Where are you from? What are your main tasks? From which source springs the inner strength that keeps you going? The answers were as varied as the people.

We enjoyed outstanding lectures, especially the one by Ilisabe Zucker on the World Trade Organisation Conference in Cancun, Mexico. There were wide-ranging question and answer sessions with Maria Thun, and wonderfully simple and touching contributions on the struggle to find time and peace for exercises and meditation. The answer lies in simplicity - just that we have lost our inner feeling for this. Who is still able to come to utter peace, touched by the beauty and completeness of an apple, for example, and finding completeness in him/herself? Where is our sense of wonder?

The striving to penetrate a very practical life with inner work - the true Rosicrucian way of spirituality inspiring any task or profession without being apparent except through the bearer's attitude and the Michaelic impulse of intelligence coupled with warmth of heart, fostering true relationships between people and nature, people and their tasks, people and the spirit, were the main themes. There was music, eurythmy, singing, fun, tears and laughter, and I left with the wonderful feeling that I was part of an amazingly strong, warm-hearted and disciplined group of women from all over Europe who are determined to do their bit to make bio-dynamic farming real and take it into the future.

Brigitte Brown

Lambing at Tablehurst

Barry and I again had the pleasure of helping with the lambing on the farm. As the flock is watched over day and night during this critical period in the farming calendar, the evenings and nights are divided into three-hour shifts. We offered our services for the 6.00pm-9.00pm slot and were able to help with attending the births, delivering lambs which present a more difficult birth such as breech, head back, leg back etc., and recording information in a log.

We learned how to feed the weaker lambs that need extra care during the first few hours of life to protect them from infection, by milking the ewe and feeding the colostrum through a tube directly into the lamb's stomach.

All the ewes are scanned earlier in pregnancy to determine how many lambs they are expecting - singles, twins, triplets, and in a few cases quads. We have found this procedure invaluable and accurate.

The lambing period lasted just over three weeks this year and we both found it very rewarding to be part of the farming year.



Barry and Rosemary Western, Tablehurst Farm Shop

Michael Hall Garden News

(The continuing story of the couch grass wars)

It's Easter Sunday night - I really should be sleeping by now. I ran away from the garden mid afternoon, leaving the tools by themselves. I had a lovely cycle ride, saw two friends, arranged some viola-playing with one and got a hand-juicer from the other.

I have to confess, my first thought was - I'm going to juice couch grass. It gives me a good feeling, not quite revenge, but at least I feel pleased to make use of the bane of my life (maybe it will make me so strong I easily dig it all up - and I'll sell it to all of you for a fortune).

I have made a homoeopathic remedy D8 of burnt and dynamized (that means I ground the ashes for one hour) couch grass seed. Now I have to spray this regularly and within four years it should give the message that the garden is not the right place for couch grass to take over.

It is hard this time to write the letter. I so often have people commenting on my enthusiasm - I don't think I've quite lost it, but I do find my work harder than usual. When it gets very hard, I start dreaming of having a year off. I think of all the things I'd like to read about and learn more - warm composts, water, visit other gardens of a similar size to mine. I'd rejoin our study groups, and there'd be a whole programme of musical projects as well.

The garden so far seems to be alright. It's hard to say when everything is only starting and like every year I'm worried whether anything will grow. Carrots are germinating, so are the weeds. Leeks are a bit thin, therefore we've sown lots more. The polytunnels are full really, with spinach, salads, radishes, parsley, chervil, chives and lovely garlic chives.

I'm growing more flowers, so that I'll be able to sell more of them as bedding plants since people always ask me for it, and I'll also have parsley and basil in pots and tomato plants for sale.

Dorothea Leber



Farm Concert

Warm thanks to Dorothea Leber and her fellow musicians for last month's concert ...
... and to everyone who attended the concert and helped to raise over £200 for Tablehurst Farm.

Plaw Hatch Seed Garden

It has been just over a year since I returned to Plaw Hatch Farm and started to cultivate a small piece of land on Holly Field for seed production. This also involved the trialing of different vegetables and comparing hybrid vegetable varieties with open pollinated varieties as ongoing research. Last year was an excellent year here for seed growing and in arrangement with Demeter Seeds Stormy Hall I grew Runner Beans, radishes, peas and flowers for seed which apart from the peas produced very good seed crops. During the season I also grew an early maturing cabbage, early purple sprouting broccoli, onions, spring onions and rainbow chard all of which are not available as Biodynamic nor Organic seed. Hence the necessity to bring these varieties under Biodynamic cultivation for seed production. The best onions and cabbages which were selected are now being grown for seed at the Mount Camphill in Wadhurst (in the glass house) and the selected broccoli and rainbow chard plants plus spring onions will be flowering in the next months and producing seeds in late summer in the Plaw Hatch seed garden. The comparison trials between hybrids and open pollinated varieties (using Biodynamic seeds) spoke well of the open pollinated varieties.

This year the garden has expanded a bit in size as I intend to increase the area of runner beans, radishes, peas and flowers for seed. Also a few more biannual crops will be included for seed production ie, onion and carrot and a parsnip variety will be trialed with the aim to produce seeds in a few years time. I will carry out more comparison trials with hybrids and open pollinated varieties using carrots, onions and leeks and raising more cabbages, broccoli, rainbow chard for seed next year. I would be very glad to show you the various crops and tell you a bit more about the work if you wish, perhaps later in the season when the crops get established June, July, August. Just ask for me on the farm or call me on 0845-3457173.

Peter Brinch

Soil Association Conference - "Finding our Food Culture"

The final conference of the Cultivating Communities Project

Abbey Home Farm, Burford Road, Cirencester, Gloucs, 10 - 12 September 2004

Aims To explore the impact of food culture on sustainable agriculture and communities

To encourage local food activism

To provide a networking opportunity for community supported agriculture groups and food activists

Who should attend

Members of organisations promoting and supporting local, organic, community food initiatives.

Format

Day 1: Fri 10th Sept - speakers and workshops - £40 for individuals

Days 2 & 3: Sat 11th & Sun 12th - Events around the farm both to explore the conference theme and to appeal as a family weekend on an organic farm - £40 adults and £20 children

Bookings and Information

contact Lucy Wallis, T:0117 9142425, E:lwallis@soilassociation.org

Activities

- Presentations and displays by CSAs from around the UK
- Workshops: organising farm events / growing vegetables for local retail / running a farm shop / establishing a local organic group / CSA: discussing shared development issues
- Cooking demonstrations
- Art, drama, poets and storytellers
- Barn dance / BBQ / Organic bar

Editor's ramblings

I hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of our newsletter. The next issues are planned for June and September. I would welcome contributions to future editions - for example individual views on the farms and the Co-op initiative, photos, illustrations, poems, recipes, etc. I would also welcome comments on how to improve the newsletter in the future. My contact details are below if you want to get in touch.

Finally, have you bought your Co-op share yet? See page 5 for details

Farm and workshop tools

Dear shareholders and friends,

With spring here (almost) and more seasonal farm help needed I would like to make a plea for any spare gardening and workshop tools which you are not using but still would be in decent working order.

Tools are always needed here and before we go out to buy new ones it is worth asking first. These could be Spades, digging forks, shovels, hoes, hand sickles, pickaxes, saws, buckets also wheelbarrows, hammers, pincers, pliers, screwdrivers, gloves, etc. There are many jobs round the farm which require tools and we would be grateful to hear from you of any tools which you would be happy to pass on

Please contact me at Plaw Hatch Farm or on tel. no. 0845-3457173

With thanks Peter Brinch

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