

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH

COMMUNITY FARM NEWS AUTumn '04

A note from the Chair:



I can report that we had an excellent AGM. This is wholly because of the success that the farms are having due to the hard work of everyone on the farms and also the loyalty of a constantly growing number of customers coming to the farms. Both farms were in profit for the year ending March 2004 and each have experienced significantly improved trading since that time.

We are now turning our sight and concerns to the future, because as we know too well nothing stands still and we are some distance from stable, sustainable enterprises. The challenge that the Co-op Committee will be putting to the farms over the next six months is to come up with five years plans that will chart a course for bringing the Co-op into really sustainable waters in terms of farm workers, housing, work buildings, products and customers. In anticipation of these plans the Co-op committee is planning three main types of activities: Improved Co-op and farm community communication (first a brochure), a drive for new members and a planning and initiation of a five year fundraising drive.

I ended the AGM with two goals for the Co-op, to provide a sustainable farming asset for the community and the development of a successful model for community supported agriculture. It is my considered feeling that both of these are well within the reach of our Co-op community. I look forward to both the process and reality of getting there..

Sincerely,

Brian Swain

AGM Highlights

- Co-op committee re-elected with the exception of John Thomson who is standing down. New committee is Brian Swain, Steve Harvey, Oliver Fynes-Clinton, Richard Evans, Peter Brink, Krista Braun and Serena Evans. More active members still sought - please approach Brian Swain if you think you could contribute.
- Both farms in profit for 2003. High demand for produce in both farm shops.
- New entrance to Plaw Hatch will hopefully come to fruition during 2005.
- New barn at Tablehurst currently stalled until land transfer completed
- Key priorities for the Co-op going forward are to increase active membership, to raise funds to invest in the farms, and to increase the levels of community activity in association with the farms. There was a lively debate at the meeting about how these objectives could be met.

Home Harvest

In the spring I was clearing out some left over bird food and instead of throwing it on the compost I threw it into a corner of the green house thinking, "green manure", in a rather vague way. Over the next few weeks I watered it on my rounds and lush green foliage quickly gave way to beautiful heads of ripening grain. There were the usual grains, barley, wheat and oats as well as some flax, which has beautiful delicate blue flowers which bloom and fade in a day, and pleasingly, a few sunflower plants.

I have always had an atavistic desire to grow some wheat, grind it into flour and make bread. Apart from the urge to do the complete ancestral thing (in a hopelessly inefficient manner), I wanted to see what it tasted like because I know that freshly milled wheat flour makes bread with much more flavour. So I thought this might be my chance. The resulting "harvest" involved cutting the straw and making a mixed sheaf of everything, and leaving it to dry.

Sorting out this sheaf, one grain type from another, then breaking open the seed heads to release the berry was unbelievably slow. It made me think of early nomadic people, before settled agriculture, discovering that the grain was edible and working out how to get at it. They would have been less generous varieties than our modern hybrids. I pictured them doing what I was doing, separating wheat from chaff perhaps at first just with fingers then by rubbing the dried seed head in the hands. Learning how the wind could help by blowing away everything except the heavy seed would have been a happy discovery. Then they would need a way of crushing the seeds to get at the goodness inside; grinding it between

two flat stones is the obvious way. Mixing with water to make a dough and using fire to alter the structure of the "bread molecules", releasing their wonderful and familiar aromas; there are still places in the world where the whole process has hardly advanced beyond this basic one. And the smell of bread-making everywhere evokes an ancient folk memory of the good hearth which provides and warms; a fact unscrupulously used by supermarkets, but still for most of us an innocent promise of pleasure to come.

But I'm afraid I didn't get that far with my little crop. My wheat yield was barely half a jam jar, and my "threshing" was not up to scratch! Beer making and porridge seemed equally futile with this paltry result. The sparrows will have it after all. I know there are more enterprising local people who use clever home grinders and make wonderful bread. For those who don't have this option there is the new season's flour from Tablehurst. After some "weather" in August the wheat has been harvested and it is milled regularly for freshness. The combine harvester, that dusty green monster which spends most of the year lurking improbably under the old pole barn on the way up to the farm, has done its work. By a series of carefully adjusted sieves, riddles, and sundry mechanisms, coordinated by a mass of pulleys and gears, it has separated the straw and chaff from the grain, and done all the work that even fifty years ago would have taken at least two machines plus tractors on most farms in the developed world and a great deal more labour... I reckon I'll leave it to them that knows 'ow.

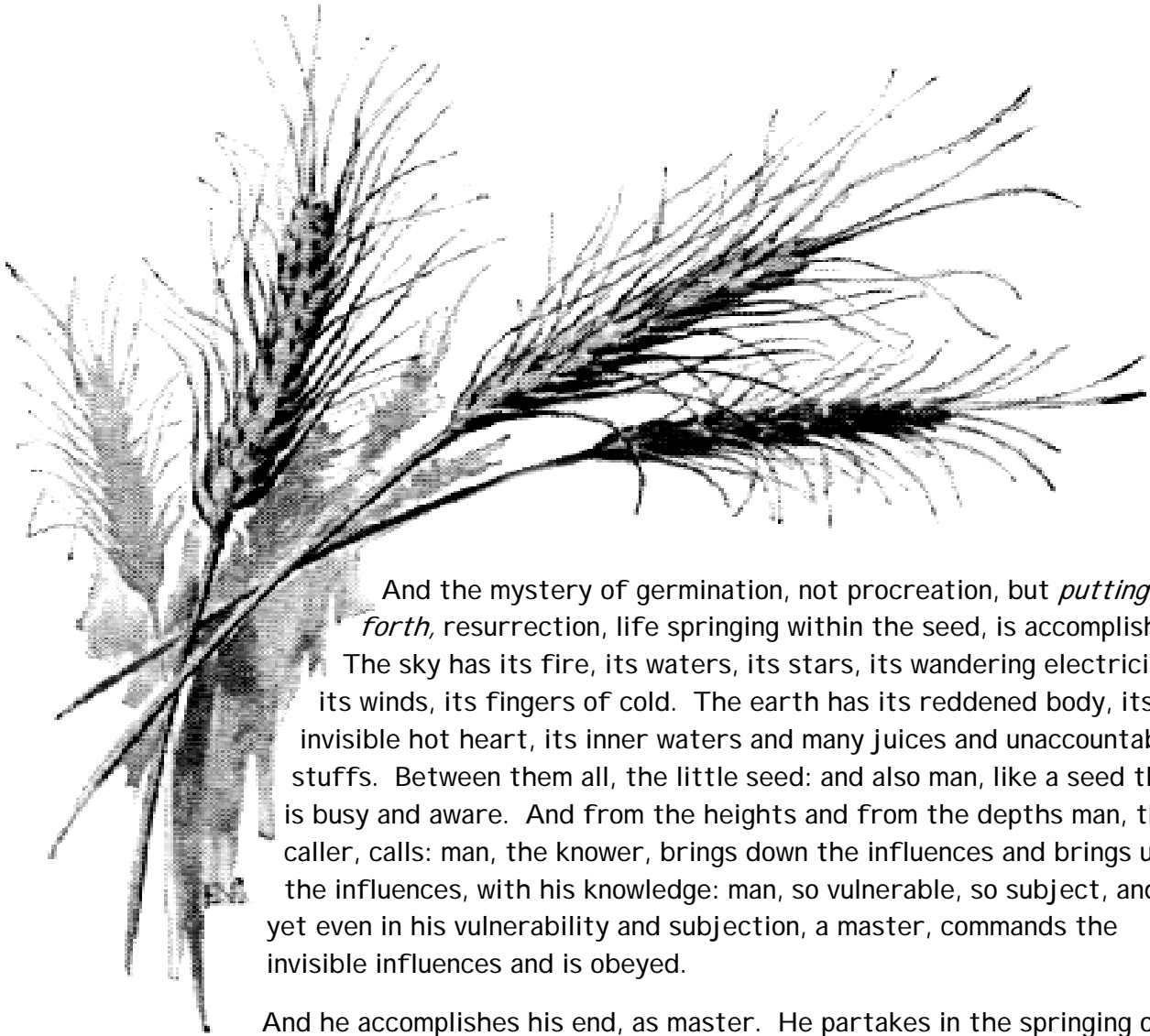
Mark Haughton

A Wet and Troublesome Harvest at Plaw Hatch

Very wet, very late, but we managed to harvest six tons of wheat and twenty tons of oats for the cows' winter feed. "A lot" was lost as we waited for a very unavailable contractor to come and combine the crops. Eventually, Sam from Tablehurst Farm was thankfully able to come over to bail us out. The combine came with its own problems, and after a few stop-starts, finally came to rest halfway up oak field with a broken gear box! The cows are now enjoying the last unharvested acre, scratching themselves on the wheels of the combine.

This year, I think we could have done the harvest on time and quicker if we had used Moss the horse and a few scythes, also, it would have been a lot more fun.

Tom Ventham



And the mystery of germination, not procreation, but *putting forth*, resurrection, life springing within the seed, is accomplished. The sky has its fire, its waters, its stars, its wandering electricity, its winds, its fingers of cold. The earth has its reddened body, its invisible hot heart, its inner waters and many juices and unaccountable stuffs. Between them all, the little seed: and also man, like a seed that is busy and aware. And from the heights and from the depths man, the caller, calls: man, the knower, brings down the influences and brings up the influences, with his knowledge: man, so vulnerable, so subject, and yet even in his vulnerability and subjection, a master, commands the invisible influences and is obeyed.

And he accomplishes his end, as master. He partakes in the springing of the corn, in the rising and the budding and earing of the corn. And when he eats his bread at last, he recovers all he once sent forth, and partakes again of the energies he called to the corn, from out of the wide universe.

*Extract from "The Dance of the Sprouting Corn",
written by DH Lawrence in 1927*

Contributed by Rose Moore

Come and eat at the Organic Cafe in Forest Row

Open every Friday for vegetarian lunch, drinks and socializing from 10am - 2pm
The Forest Row Community Centre, Hartfield Road, Forest Row
A service provided by a small group of volunteers and the Parish Council

We serve only freshly prepared wholefoods and use all Organic/Demeter, GM-Free ingredients.

Gorgeous Meals in the Spirit of Community

We are recruiting volunteers now for the Autumn/Winter

Please call Claudine on (01342) 824443 for more info, to reserve a table,
or to book a special diet meal

All profits from this Cafe are used by the Parish Council
to fund local projects.

Apples at Tablehurst

Chris Marshall in conversation with Stein Leenders in the Tablehurst orchard

It was during a visit to the Warmanderhof in Holland in the Autumn of 2000 that Peter Brown first met Stein Leenders who now looks after the apple orchard at Tablehurst Farm. The two men quickly developed an arrangement through which Stein and his partner Noor could come to

Apple Histories

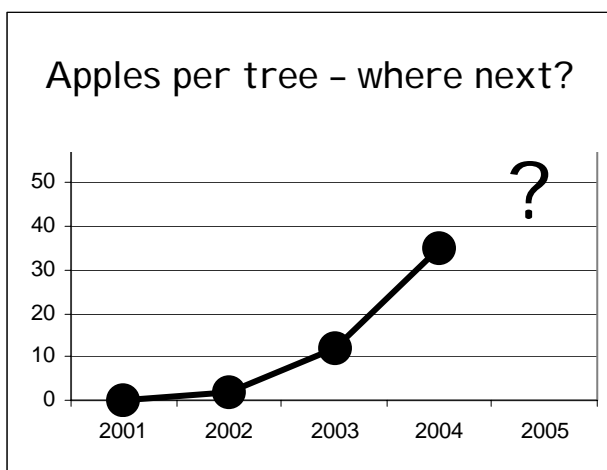
Both Jonagold and Elstar are recent hybrids of the Golden Delicious variety. The former was crossed with variety Jonathan in New York State and introduced to the market in 1968. Elstar was introduced just four years later in the Netherlands, and is a cross between Golden Delicious and Ingrid Marie.

Tablehurst Farm and establish an apple orchard whilst also participating in the other enterprises on the farm.

Stein and Noor arrived in January of 2001 and swiftly set about purchasing trees and planting out the orchard. In total, they have over 37,000 trees. The majority are the Jonagold variety, but there are 6,000 Elstars and 1,000 Early Windsors, the latter to act as pollinators to the rest of the orchard. Jonagolds are not particularly easy to grow organically, but they have excellent eating quality and the trees were available at a good price.

How Many Apples?

Initial apple yields were very low, but in the last two years, they have been rising fast, with averages of 12 apples per tree in 2003 and around 35 in 2004. Considering that 12 is about the UK average yield for organic apple trees, this is quite an achievement in so short a time. Stein is not finished yet, however. He believes that there is scope to do more. He showed me one tree absolutely laden with fruit. I estimated 75 apples on this one small plant, but Stein assured me that he had counted them carefully himself, and there were 98!



Season by Season

Through the winter months, the main task in the orchard is pruning. This is a skilled job, and there is no substitute for working the trees individually by hand. Stein reckons that each row of trees takes about five hours to prune, so this work occupies him through most of the winter. In the springtime, the biggest challenge, and the biggest threat to yield, is loss of blossom to late frosts. At this time of year, Stein is often up in the night caring for his trees.

Throughout the growing season, spraying is necessary. In total, the trees receive about twenty sprays a year in four main categories. Copper and sulphur are sprayed primarily to control pests, whereas seaweed and biodynamic preparations are sprayed to improve the health of the trees.

How do you protect a delicate apple blossom from destruction by a late frost? Why, cover it in a thick layer of ice of course!



Stein protects his blossoms on frosty nights by spraying them continuously with water. This builds up a layer of ice around the flower, sufficient to protect it from damage.

The highlight of the year of course is the harvest, in full swing as I write. Stein and Noor normally work the orchard with very limited assistance, but in September, they must assemble a gang of around fifteen or twenty willing workers to pick the fruit. This is difficult to organise because the timing is so critical. If the fruit is not ripe, nobody will want to buy it, but if the apples are allowed to ripen too far, their keeping properties are badly undermined. To test ripeness, Stein paints iodine onto the cut surface of an apple. This creates a distinctive pattern depending on the balance of starch and sugar in the fruit. By matching the pattern to a standard chart, Stein is able to pick his fruit at optimum ripeness.

Stein expects to produce a total of 160 tons of apples this year. Of these, about 100 tons will be of a high enough quality to sell as dessert apples, with the remainder being made into juice.



Michael Hall Garden News

I can't really report anything sensational from Michael Hall Garden. I had a feeling the weeds might have been more sensational this year than in any other year - was it all the rain? - or was it me getting more tired? But there are also lovely vegetables. I'm quite determined to persevere with my couch grass seed, dock seed and bindweed pepper.

During the summer months, I'm quite dependent on volunteers who I do try to see as extra not as essential, but this year I don't know what I'd have done without them. I was very lucky. Two very lovely hard working German girls came, Sarah for 6 weeks and Larissa for 4 weeks. They both were really good gardeners. One day, I very very nearly got some help from a hungry customer. There were no potatoes in the shop and I said that I just had not managed to dig the last row. He offered to come with his son to do the job. This really made my day - I felt I could relax a bit. So often help comes just at the right time and it gives me the feeling that somebody is looking after me and the garden. Unfortunately, my lovely customer couldn't dig the potatoes because his wife didn't let him go and told him to first do his own garden.

David Freiburg who's been such a good help for one year has left. He went back home with his family to Pennsylvania to look after his own land. Ken Takewaki, who's been volunteering for the last four years helps me now. He will join the apprentice training scheme. Ken is a photographer. Who knows, we might get some lovely pictures of the vegetables.

Dorothea Leber

Tablehurst Farm Notebook

It has been an exciting summer. Having so many enterprises, so many animals, so many fields, so many people makes for an interesting and 'dizzying' life! The English weather helps spice it up even more!

Like other farmers with cereals, we became ever more worried as the wet weather continued through August and the crops looked blacker and blacker. As we had no proper grain drying facility, but only the possibility to blow air through a couple of the storage bins, we had to sit and wait as it looked ever more hopeless. Andrew saw a mobile grain drier for sale, which we went to look at and bought for £3,500, bringing it back from near Bath on a trailer behind the Landrover. It was 16'6" high, which made it quite an experience going down the motorway and under all the

Tablehurst Farm Notebook continued ...

bridges, which one suddenly noticed other vehicles had scraped in the past. Anyway, the drier enabled us to start combining at last, just as the weather also changed bringing a miraculous dry spell which went on longer than any of us had hoped for. The drier, after a few teething problems, worked really well, enabling us to store properly dried crops instead of having to blow bins for weeks as in the past. This will be important for future years. As in the past we have baled a lot of straw on Ashdown Farm next door, which we are still carting with tractors and trailers. Next comes spreading compost, ploughing and sowing, if it does not get too wet.

The shop has been doing well as ever. It was shut for two weeks in August, for the first time, so that Barry and Rosemary could get a proper break. This coincided with the wet weather, so we took the chance to put down £5,000 worth of concrete through the farmyard, which should make a big difference for the customers this winter. Even if it does get muddy it can be power-washed clean, unlike the previous road surface.

The tin shed, down from the shop and across from the toilet, has been re-roofed with Mark Haughton's help and we have put in a concrete floor. The top section will be made into two pens for the day old chicks. They come every fortnight and will remain in a pen until they are three weeks old when they get moved up to the houses in Clay Field. Until now we have been using old lorry bodies for this so it will be a big improvement. The lower section of the building will be fully enclosed and will be shelved creating a proper organised storage area for all the many things one needs to store such as pipe fittings, fencing equipment, electrical fittings and grain augers.

The lorry bodies, used to house chickens for the last nine years in Clay Field, are also about to be replaced. We have bought five second-hand (three year old) proper mobile chicken houses, which should be delivered in the next couple of weeks. This will consolidate the poultry enterprise onto a different level. On top of all the practical advantages it will be a relief on aesthetic grounds to be able to remove the old lorry bodies, at last. Despite knowing that there was no other way economically to have developed the chicken enterprise to where it is today without them, they have always been a slight embarrassment, a blot on the landscape.

There has also been a change to the day-old chicks themselves. We had to find a supplier of organic chicks, which we have done, and for a while we have been comparing the new ones (a slightly different breed) with the old to ensure that they are comparable despite being slightly slower growing. We have yet to see if there is a difference in taste.

There is little to say about the cattle, sheep and pigs as there has been little change and are all well. The polytunnels and the garden below the orchards have looked great throughout the summer and we have been enjoying the produce for our own meals as well as plenty going to the shop. The orchards are about to be harvested with a team of about 15 on standby. It looks a good crop of beautiful apples on the trees.

Sam, who has been with us since April and is now a married man will go over to America after the apple harvest. Sam has been an important part of the team doing a large part of the skilled tractor work and most of the combining. We will be sorry to see him go. Andrew Carnegie joined us in July and has already become indispensable! Susam Cram joined us as an apprentice from the beginning of September and we are happy that Gabi, our French apprentice is staying for a second year. As always we have had a bunch of wonderful young people from many different countries join and help us over the summer.

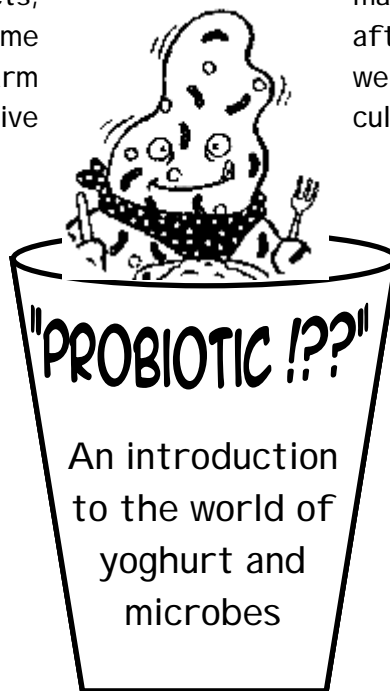
Peter Brown

As well as introducing new packaging for our Plaw Hatch Farm organic natural yoghurt, we recently decided to start using a new type of yoghurt culture. You may have noticed the red sticker: "Now with Probiotic Live Culture" and wondered what it meant.

Yoghurt is made by adding certain specific types bacteria to previously sterilised warm milk. We tend to think of all bacteria as 'bad' but many are actually very good for us. These special yoghurt bacteria are produced under hygienic, controlled conditions and are referred to as a culture; the bacteria convert lactose (the sugar naturally present in milk) to lactic acid. This process makes the milk 'set' to a semi-solid state and produces the slightly sharp acid taste characteristic of yoghurt. So fresh yoghurt always contains living yoghurt bacteria. However, in order to increase the "shelf-life" of yoghurt products, many commercial manufacturers sterilise the yoghurt a second time after it is made to kill off all the yoghurt bacteria. At Plaw Hatch Farm we have never done this; our yoghurt has always contained a 'live culture'.

What is a 'Probiotic Culture'?

'Probiotic' is a word of Greek origin meaning 'for life' and the idea is that they have a life-promoting effect. Probiotic cultures contain strains of bacteria that are naturally present in the digestive system of any healthy individual. The human digestive system needs to maintain a balance of some 500 species of bacteria in order for it to function properly. Different types of bacteria eaten in the form of yoghurt are thought to help maintain this healthy balance. Different types of probiotic culture contain different strains of bacteria, each of which is associated with different potential health benefits.



meaning 'for life' and the idea effect. Probiotic cultures naturally present in the individual. The human digestive of some 500 species of probiotic cultures properly. Probiotic cultures thought to help maintain this probiotic culture contain of which is associated with

Which types of bacteria are in the new Plaw Hatch Farm Organic Yoghurt?

We chose a culture containing a balanced mix of 3 bacteria: Lactobacillus acidophilus LA-5, Bifidobacterium BB-12 (often called Bifidus), and Streptococcus thermophilus.

What are the health benefits associated with these probiotic bacteria?

There is a huge amount of information available concerning the possible health benefits of probiotic yoghurt. The main areas appear to be: aiding recovery from diarrhoea, strengthening the immune system, countering yeast-based infections such as thrush and the reduction of some pathogenic and carcinogenic processes. It is important to emphasise that there is not yet universal agreement that probiotic bacteria are completely responsible for all of these benefits.

The main reason we chose to switch to a probiotic culture for Plaw Hatch Farm Organic Yoghurt is that this particular culture produces a very pleasing, mild tasting yoghurt with a good 'set'. Also, the reduced acidity means that we don't have to put so much sugar in our fruit yoghurts — which we think is an added health benefit in itself. So, if it helps keep your gut healthy, that's an added bonus as far as we are concerned!

PS. All the Plaw Hatch yoghurt products now contain this probiotic culture.

Patrick Shaw

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, Trees, Priory Road, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5HF.

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

AddressPostcode

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

Comings and Goings at Plaw Hatch


Simon Blaxland de Lange is stepping down as chairman of the management group and as a Director of Old Plaw Hatch Farm Ltd. Simon jumped into the breach during the crisis in the Co-op and the management of Plaw Hatch Farm. As an external director he first provided a balanced view for the management of the farm and was essential in shepherding the farm through some very difficult social and commercial times. What makes the Co-op ultimately viable is that people like Simon are willing to give generously of their time and skills when they are really needed.

The Co-op Committee would like to formally thank Simon for the significant time, effort and heart that he contributed to Plaw Hatch Farm, and the Co-op. He will continue as a trustee of St Anthony's, the Trust that owns the Plaw Hatch Farm land and buildings.

We would also like to announce that Mike Eichner has become an outside Director and will act as chairman of the Plaw Hatch management group. Mike has been working as part of the Plaw Hatch management team for the last year, contributing his business knowledge and skills to the farm. Also joining the group will be Jenny Exley, a chartered landscape architect whose skills and knowledge will be particularly useful in developing the farm's future plans.

We welcome them both to the management team.

Brian Swain



Go on . . . buy a Co-op share. You know it makes sense . . .

Contacts

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Steve Harvey, Treasurer	824808

For all general enquiries about the Co-op, please contact Chris Marshall in the first instance