

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS WINTER '05

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## Michael Hall Garden News

The time of year has come again when I think ahead very much. The seeds are waiting in the cupboard and it's a rather magic cupboard considering that the whole of the garden is inside it. The plans are worked out on paper, again about a hundred varieties of vegetables, flowers and herbs. The experiment for this year is planting sweetcorn and squash together as companions. There still is the potential for everything to turn out perfectly. It's a time so full of hope, for all the seeds to germinate really well, for good growing weather, for endless energy to keep up with the garden's demands, for summer volunteers etc.

Ken Takewaki has been volunteering for the last four years and joined me as part-time assistant in September. Now, in February, he will formally start his two years with the biodynamic apprentice training scheme, taking part in all the block courses and I will be his trainer in all the practical skills. Ken is a professional photographer and has moved to Forest Row now with his wife Masami and his son Ugen, a wonderful addition to our community.

Another thing that keeps me very busy during the winter is preparation for the yearly "Farms Concert". It will take place on the 6<sup>th</sup> March at 5.00pm in the Long Room. This year's programme, including Mozart and Vivaldi, will be quite suitable for children, therefore the earlier time. I'm hoping that many of us will be there to share in the concert, which in gratitude is dedicated to our land and to what lives and grows on it. Since we ourselves are out of the "will-we-survive?" state at least for the moment, we'd like to help very poor farmers and the proceeds will be shared between the Co-op and the Kaloko Trust, which Julia and Tom Ventham have worked with in Zambia. The project includes a farm training centre, Aids help, a health centre, and a school. It teaches people to help themselves. What for our standards is a smallish sum and doesn't reach very far can work wonders there.

## Plaw Hatch Closed on Sundays

In recent years, the Plaw Hatch Farm Shop has grown increasingly busy, with the result that more and more staff are needed to keep it running - three on most days and four on Saturdays. In this context, keeping the shop open seven days a week is proving too much of a strain on the limited resources at the farm. To address this, the farm shop will, with effect from Easter Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> March, be closed on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

We apologise for any inconvenience this  
may cause

Dorothea Leber

# Hedge Planting

It was a weekend morning in late January with more than a hint of sunshine, but a definite chill in the air. At any one time between twenty and forty volunteers were busy planting new hedges along the half-mile boundary track of Spring Hill Farm. This is land which Tablehurst now manages together with the Douch family who own these fields.

Forty years ago hedgerows here had been pulled out; everything was done by hand, and Gerald Pendry, the then farmer, could not afford the manual labour to maintain them. This was common policy up and down the country at that time; vast fields were created and agribusiness pushed the fertility to produce more and more crops with annual applications of chemical fertilizers. With funding from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, the hedges are being reinstated. Gerald Pendry, now in his eighties, happened to walk by and said how happy he was seeing us all putting the hedges back.

The instructions from Peter were straightforward: *We've loosened the earth with the digger; follow the guiding stick along the trench, get your spade in and cut a slit, ease the plant in and firm the soil around with the ball of your foot.* I was surprised how close together we put the plants in - a mix of native beech and blackthorn, English oak and field maple, guelder rose and hawthorn, spindle, hazel and holly. Over the years the hedge will create a thick growth to keep stock in and provide a haven for wild-life.

It is wonderful to be part of a group of people working together. There were the familiar faces from many farming events over the years as well as new ones too and families with small children - a brother and sister came well equipped with their own miniature green wheelbarrows. At lunch-time we ate in the garden of one of the family cottages as if it was a summer day - a delicious outdoor meal as a reward for the hard work.

These community activities bring to my mind images of how medieval country life - and indeed not even so far back in time as that - must have been when everyone in the village joined in events like the harvest - because their lives and stomachs depended on the food they nurtured. In this current age - if we are to realize sound environmental aims of eating locally and sustaining our bio-dynamic farms, our lives too depend on community involvement - the giving of our energies - because this type of farming requires an intensity of hands-on work that just can't be met by the farm-team. It is perhaps harking back to a pre-machine age.

It was extraordinary how quickly our many hands got the plants in. By the end of Sunday afternoon, Jonny Douch said: "We did much more than we expected. We worked hard - it is fantastic knowing that with Tablehurst's help we are restoring the hedges as part of the nature conservation work we are doing."

Two weeks later, we tackled the Brambletye field, owned by myself and Mark Haughton. This too was part of Springhill Farm in recent years, but previously belonged to the Brambletye Estate and borders the River Medway. We are dividing the 37 or so acres into three fields; at the highest point East Grinstead church tower is visible - benches are to be sited for walkers to rest and enjoy the views which - if you can forget the telegraph poles - can not have changed for hundreds of years. It is truly a lovely spot.

As I write at the end of a Friday in mid-February and helped by apprentices from the Emerson agricultural course, we got the last plants in as dusk fell. Altogether over this two-week period some thirteen thousand plants went into the ground. As for Peter, he says, there is a deep sense of satisfaction that after all the planning, the hedges are in place.

Monica Suswin



# Owning your Land

I am coming to understand about ownership of land. A quick look through the dictionary of quotations (should you have it to hand!) is a reminder of the complexity and depth of this social phenomenon of ownership. Nearly all the quotations under property refer to land and deal with its primacy in the construction of our social reality both negative and positive. Buying the Brambletye field with my partner Monica has helped me to see some of the paradoxes. Tablehurst has incorporated most of the field into their rotation of grazing, silage and crop growing. It is owned by us in law, and the farm have tenancy, but all sorts of other people have a real and even legally defined interest in it.

The environment agency surprised us a bit this year by mowing the vegetation along the river banks, which we had come to enjoy for its relatively untouched wildness. It is now very tidy. Removing all that wildness will prevent flooding apparently, but I would like to find out whether we can prevent the wholesale loss of such rich habitat in future. On a similar theme there is a large water pipe buried under the field to which we have to give access if required, and an overhead cable with similar covenants attached.

We share the land too with walkers and joggers who use its various footpaths. East Sussex Council maintains the bridges which cross the river giving access to these paths; stiles and fences also have to be maintained for their benefit. Then there are people living nearby who enjoy the views of it through their windows. The field is a part of the landscape we all love, and in a sense own, and this communal pleasure is protected in various ways in planning law.

Obviously the field also has a primary significance as part of the farm's means of production. Customers at the farm shop enjoy the animals which are reared on it and the meat they give. They feel strongly about the way the land is managed and want to know where their food comes from and that it is biodynamic. There is a huge element of mutual trust and dependence around this between farmer and customer.

When we were planting the hedges this winter I arrived on the field promptly at 9.00 o'clock on the Sunday. It was damp and muddy and I started work. No one arrived. The church bell in the village rang. I thought, I could be in church. Where were all the people? A chink of light peered through the cloud. I could pray, I thought. Then the thought, I'm not alone. If I believe in forces and energies beyond the visible and "known", I am surrounded by them, here on this beautiful land; I am surrounded by angels! At that moment I knew it to be true. A little later, after the angels, Rachel, a friend staying from Norfolk, arrived and then others with children and then more people. We had a great day.

Many people would like very much to be able to buy land and do what we are doing. We are very lucky and I feel it. But nobody owns this field, not me, not the community, not even all the birds and plants which are blithely and delightfully present. It all just is. And then again I do own it, as much as you or a bird nesting in some thicket by the river. My legal ownership only means I must become more of a channel for the life of the field. And responsible for being here on Sunday morning, for helping plant the hedge which will enhance it in all sorts of ways, for realising my dream, a dream, thankfully, I share with many others. This great sod under my feet, damp, claggy and way too big a thing for my spade alone belongs to us all in the sense that we are all responsible for it and can all enjoy it's gifts.

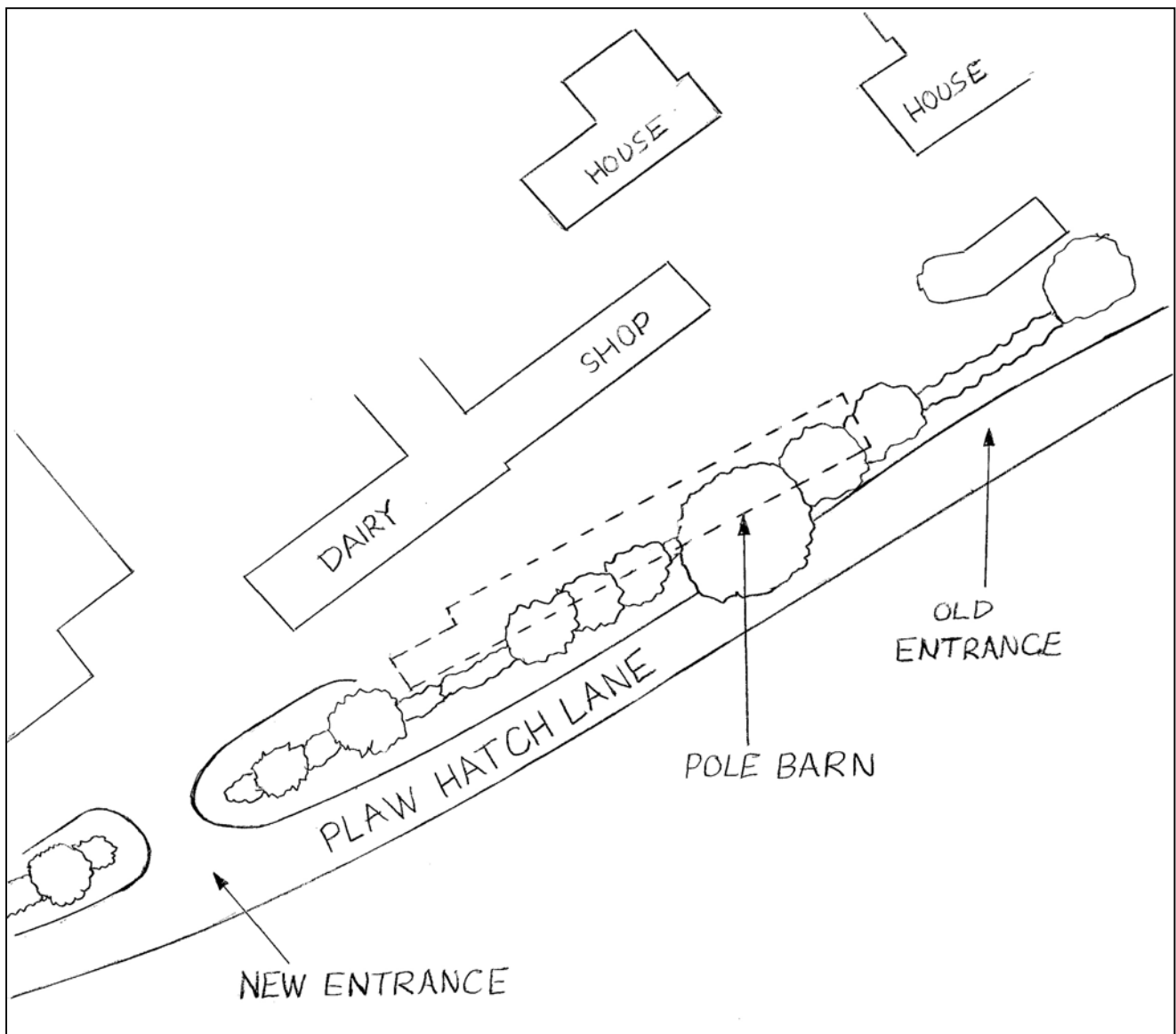
Mark Haughton

## Have you considered becoming a farm shareholder?

Our farms at Plaw Hatch and Tablehurst provide something really special in our local community. To maintain this for the long term, we need as many individuals as possible to share responsibility for our enterprise by joining in ownership of our farm businesses. Becoming a shareholder is straightforward, costs £100, and involves no other personal undertaking. Nearly 400 people have already made this commitment. We invite you to join them. An application form can be found on page 6.

## Improvements at Plaw Hatch

The Plaw Hatch shop has experienced huge growth in recent years. Since 2000, customer numbers have more than doubled and sales have more than trebled. We are tremendously encouraged by these increases, as they demonstrate that the service we provide to the local community is truly valued. However, one inevitable consequence of this success has been an increase in the traffic in and out of the farm. In this context, the poor siting of the farm entrance on a bend in the road has become an increasing cause for concern. To address this, plans are now well advanced for a new entrance to be constructed further to the west, where emerging vehicles will be more visible to passing traffic. To accommodate this, two new pole barns are to be constructed beyond the existing cattle barn so that the existing pole barn opposite the shop can be demolished. The space this frees up will be used to provide better car parking arrangements for shop customers.



It is hoped that that the works for the new entrance will be completed later this year. In parallel with these external works, we plan to improve throughput of customers inside the shop at busy times by providing an additional till and speeding up the weighing and pricing process for fruit and vegetables. We hope that these improvements will make shopping at Plaw Hatch both a safer and an more enjoyable experience.

# The Future of the Co-op and the Farms

Just before Christmas, a ceremony took place at Tablehurst Farm to mark the formal transfer of the Tablehurst Farm land from Emerson College Trust to St Anthony's Trust. This completes an important first stage in the life of our Co-op, in that we now have both common ownership for our two farm businesses (owned by the community through the Co-op) and common ownership of the land and buildings at both farms (held in trust for the community by St Anthony's Trust). It is therefore a timely moment to be looking forward to future plans for the farms.

To this end, a meeting was convened in late January with representatives of the Co-op, St Anthony's Trust and both farm management teams present. In preparation for the meeting, each farm management team had prepared a "shopping list" of improvements that they would like to make to the farms if funds were available. The main items are summarised below. Timings shown are only indicative at this stage.

Year	Plaw Hatch Farm	Tablehurst Farm
2005	New Entrance (see facing page) New pole barns Shop improvements	New barn including a workshop Chicken preparation facility Shop improvements
2006	Community room and/or café New barns Dairy improvements	Convert vegetable store to a new house Improve the road from the A22
Beyond 2006	Two new houses Conversion of existing accommodation Extend shop building Chicken house Recover reedbeds and reservoir	Farm community centre Further road improvements Convert Tablehurst barn to a new house New cattle barn and hay barn

Clearly, to meet these aspirations even in part will require substantial fund-raising beyond the revenues that can be generated by the farm businesses. The Co-op and St Anthony's Trust agreed to address this challenge and come up with a fund-raising strategy.

The meeting then went on to address the question of land. Today, Tablehurst is farming 260 acres of "our" land and a further 200 leased acres. This raises the wider question of whether it should be a priority for our Co-op enterprise to take more land into trust for the community.

Finally, recognising that some of the initial objectives of the Co-op founders have now been achieved, the meeting discussed the future role of the Co-op and the farms in the community beyond the simple provision of food. This led to a wide ranging debate around the overarching objectives of our enterprise and what role each of the four entities within it - St Anthony's Trust, the Co-op and the two farm businesses - should take in serving those objectives. It was agreed that a further meeting would be needed to focus on these issues with a view to developing some specific ideas around these themes for presentation to the wider Co-op community.

Chris Marshall

# Getting to know your farms

We would like to invite you to see for yourselves how our two Biodynamic farms produce the foods you buy and eat, and to show you in a series of themed talks and practical demonstrations how everything within the farm is connected and interdependent. This includes planetary rhythms, compost making, the micro life of the soil and the rearing of animals and growing of vegetables that finally end up on your plate.

A Biodynamic farm differs from any other farm entity in that it holds as a central principle the ideals of being a self-contained, mixed farm providing as far as possible its own seeds, fertility and feed for a wide range of animals using specific preparations which promote and stimulate vitality of soil and plants. It also seeks to encourage wild flora and fauna life of the environment from ponds and hedges to orchards, woods and pastures. It is up to each farmer to develop the right blend of animals, crops and environments to encourage bird and insect life and to provide a harmonious and sustainable balance for his own holding.

Biodynamics is an internationally recognized approach to organic agriculture and is practiced in nearly 40 countries throughout the five continents. The Biodynamic Agricultural Association is the oldest association promoting a healthy soil and environment, and was founded in the 1920's. Biodynamic produce is marketed under the international Demeter - goddess of fertility - symbol in shops 28 countries around the world. The themed talks are to be held on a Saturday afternoon every month from 2.30 - 4.30 p.m. Afterwards a cup of tea will be served. The first two talks are scheduled as follows:

Saturday 9 April at Tablehurst Farm	Sheep on a biodynamic farm	Peter Brown
Saturday 14 May at Plaw Hatch Farm	The secret life of the milking cow	Tom Ventham

Further themes we hope to bring you in future months include:

Flowers on the farm	Cereals and seed growing	Vegetable growing in a market garden
The orchards	Beef cattle	Milk processing and cheese-making
Working with the stars	Forestry	Butchery
Biodynamic field sprays	Poultry	Compost making
Haymaking and silage	Wild birds on the farm	Farm machinery

These talks are meant mainly for adults, however children from 10 years and upwards are welcome to this learning experience while the younger ones from 3 - 9 year olds are welcome at the Farm Club with Jean Kingsley Monks during that time (Jean also runs the Hoathly Hill kindergarten in West Hoathly). For participation please ring Jean on 01342 810762.

## 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, RH18 5HF.

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

Address .....Postcode .....

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

The programme of talks will be advertised in the farm shops, where you will be able to sign up to participate on particular dates. If you are unable to come to the shops, please contact the either Plaw Hatch Farm Shop on 01342 810201 or Tablehurst Farm Shop on 01342 823173. On behalf of Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms we look forward to welcoming you.

Peter Brinch and Krista Braun

## Farmers Notebook

Overall, things are going quite well on the farm and as usual there is lots happening.

Sadly, Jup and Helle left us in the beginning of February. They had been with us for a year and a half, running the house and the polytunnels and doing much of the day care for Stuart, Clive and Terry. Although they had both taught or worked with people with learning disabilities for years they had not lived with them as a family. This aspect they found not so easy in our situation. They have moved back to their house in Uckfield. Jup and Helle have been an important part of the team and we are grateful for all they have done here.

For the next months Robin, my son, and his partner Laura Gemmell are running the house. Laura is a teacher's assistant at Philpots School, which she will continue, and Robin is a blacksmith trying to build up his business slowly. Their involvement is therefore part-time, mainly evenings and Sundays but it is working very well. In the meantime we are advertising for a family to join us, ideally a farmer, to take on the house and help with the day-care.

Due to the amount of work that Barry has to carry we have also been advertising for another butcher or for somebody to work alongside him to learn the job. We feel we have found the right person in Richard Pollard, who has not done butchering but is keen to learn. Richard and his wife Melanie, who already works part-time in the shop, live in Forest Row.

We have also advertised for another farmer to join Andrew and I, as well as for apprentices. The position is not yet filled but we are having interviews. On 1<sup>st</sup> March we have a new apprentice joining us, and a second on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Susan, who joined us in September, is doing very well and is great with all the animals. Gabi, who joined us a year ago last September, will be leaving in the beginning of May after the lambing, of which she is in charge.

We had one of those lovely phone calls in January when Gregor Wobschall phoned up from Germany, where he is studying forestry, offering to come over for the month of February to do some chain-sawing. He has been here a couple of times previously, the last time two years ago, when we sent him on a chain-sawing course to learn. He could not have come at a better time, as a lot of hedges and trees needed cutting back to enable us to put up fences.

On the first hedge-planting weekend in January we were blessed by the most beautiful weather. We had a good turnout and managed to plant nearly nine thousand plants. On the second weekend a fortnight later the weather was not so good and the turnout not so good either but those who came did very well and it is amazing what was achieved. It is wonderful to have all the hedges in and now we just have to finish putting down the straw mulch and, of course, putting up the fences.

Simon Joiner should also be mentioned. Simon is a mechanic based in Yorkshire but for many years he has been coming down to Forest Row three or four times a year for about a week. He stays at Plaw Hatch and does the mechanical work on the vehicles, tractors and implements of both farms. A long, long time ago he lived and worked on Tablehurst, as well as other farms, so he knows farm machines as well as cars. That, together with the care he takes, is why he is so valuable. He is here again this week as busy as ever, ensuring that everything is going to work properly when it is needed this spring.

The animals and crops are not getting a mention this time but they are also fine. The sheep are all in the barn awaiting lambing and the fields are awaiting dry weather before they are ploughed and the spring crops sown.

Peter Brown

# FARMS CONCERT

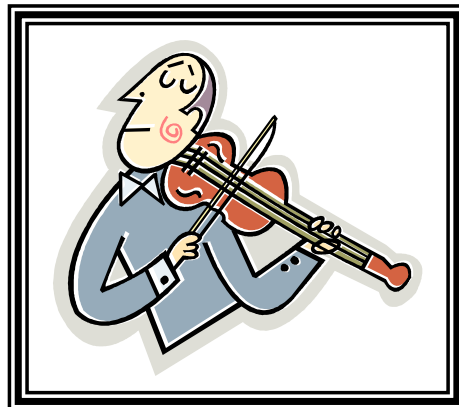
SUN 6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 5.00 PM

LONG ROOM, MICHAEL HALL MANSION

EVERYBODY WELCOME



Mozart String Quintet and work by  
Vivaldi, Dowland and Schumann



Dorothea Leber, Diane Howard, George Robertson,  
Patricia Calnan, Shereen Godber, Ben Hess, Julian Broughton

Proceeds to be shared by the Co-op and the Kaloko Trust in Zambia

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

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Tablehurst Farm 823173  
Michael Hall Garden 825604

Co-op Officers

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Oliver Fynes-Clinton, Secretary 823966  
Steve Harvey, Treasurer 824808