

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

CHRISTMAS '06

Plaw Hatch Farm 2006. A year of the unexpected.

Farming always throws up surprises. The animals, weather, people, machinery. When anyone ever asks, 'how's it all going' I always say fine!! I explain that I am becoming resistant to surprises, nothing shocks me any more so it will always be fine. I look at this as a measure of experience, trying with anxiety to anticipate what could go wrong and loving it when it goes right.

In truth it has been a challenging year with lots of shocking surprises with some nice ones too!

Cows poaching the spring pastures very badly, definitely to be avoided if possible. Very long hot dry summer, great for the swimming trips to the lake at the end of the day! But not so good for cows producing milk off grass or the pigs trying to get their noses in the ground! The cows escaped a lot this year looking for greener pastures, I lost them twice in the Ashdown forest, they were quite happy. Harvest another potential stress point with the vintage convertible Massy falling apart after a few acres but fantastic that a friend lent us a more modern Class Dominator 15 ft (large) cut, with a cab where the dog and I could sit in comfort and remain relatively dust free. I felt on top of the world driving this as did everybody else who had a go. All the winter corn was planted on the right moon day with perfect ground conditions. We sprayed more Biodynamic preparation than ever before this year thanks to the loan of a flow form from John Wilkes. Blackie having 14 piglets; the mysterious fire that burnt half the barn down with precious barley straw and the Class Dominator! Staying up all night with the fire brigade to help keep the fire under control. The slides being all mixed up for the talk at the Co-op AGM. The new entrance, what a fantastic difference that has made and really opened us up to the



Dawn in Home Field

Continued overleaf

Brigitte Brown and Warren Ashe

It is our sad duty to report the deaths of two central figures in the development of the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Co-operative – Brigitte Brown and Warren Ashe. The Co-op and the community owe them both a huge debt of gratitude for their contributions to our initiative.

A year of the unexpected (continued)

outside. It has brought in lots of new customers, new faces suddenly appear in the milking parlour asking lots of questions. Dawn our oldest cow (14) died after losing her last calf, she was so dignified. Rose another younger cow who damaged her hips also put down. The polish students Rafal and Ania leaving to start a BD farm back home having been here a year on the apprenticeship scheme. Lots of people coming and going. Susan coming to run the dairy making all the lovely yoghurts and cheese, all the things I dreamed about doing but never having the time. The enormous support from so many people, especially Richard Evans with his huge commitment to the farm. The holiday with my family after the harvest was the best, although Julia wasn't that impressed that it was on a dairy farm in Wales!! Well that's a bit of what happened. Now the cows are all in, we have to survive with what little food we have for them. The recent late autumn calving has given us some promising heifer calves. The winter is a time to tackle all those Defra forms, budgets, fencing fields and dealing with a lot of muck and mud. The new milk carton machine arrives soon for the milk and will be a relief to stop using all those chemicals for washing the milk bottles. Best wishes to you all for a greener, peaceful 2007.

Tom Ventham

Plaw Hatch Dairy – Under New Management

I have been at Plaw Hatch for slightly over 2 months, which seems strange to say as it feels like I've been here forever. I mean that in the positive context, I'm feeling settled and at home already.

The dairy in itself is proving to be a challenge, which is exciting. My previous dairy experience was mainly cheesemaking with a 30 litre pot of yoghurt made once a week. Here it's the other way around, at the moment, as the cheesemaking takes a back seat when we don't have the full quota of milk available. Yoghurt production takes place over 4 days of the week, together with cream separating and pasteurising. In the last 2 months we have made a small batch of cheese only 3 times. But, I shouldn't become too complacent, as that will soon change!

As I have a love of "tasty things", working with yoghurt allows a certain amount of creativity that you are not always allowed to do with cheese. A short while after being here a consensus was made on the use of imported, out of season fruits ie. raspberries and strawberries in the dairy. I felt it would not financially ruin the dairy to make this change as our customers are meant to not only support our community agriculture, but also our commitment towards biodynamic practices i.e. using local seasonal produce. Thus far we have been using apples and honey from Tablehurst farm. These new products have been received with enthusiasm and are literally 'flying' off the shelves, it's hard to keep up! So, so far, so good. We will also make the festive yoghurt in December which was so popular last year, but it's also not the best time of year to be looking for variety.

For those who don't know we are also on the verge of changing our milk packing to cartons (a long story). The dairy is a bit upside down with all the renovation work going on amongst the production, which Patrick Shaw is undertaking. The machine should be arriving mid-December. Just another thing to keep us on our toes, but in the long run it should be a great investment.

I have lots of ideas for the dairy, it's hard to be patient and contain it!

Susan Cram

Tablehurst Farmers' Notebook.

Today, as I write, the first turkeys have been plucked in the new poultry processing building and we shall be continuing to pluck for the next week to get through them all. Fortunately, we have the help of students from the Biodynamic course at Emerson college during this time in the afternoons. We are grateful for their help and we would hope that they will be able to bank the experience as a good, interesting and fun one.

There are still some finishing off details that need to be completed in the building, but we are basically there and can now celebrate the last of 7 interim claims for grant from DEFRA for the project as a whole (the new shop and poultry building). Peter has led and masterminded the practicalities of the poultry building and, as he is not writing this, it can fall to me as a colleague to acknowledge the huge effort he has put into it especially against the background of Brigitte's terminal illness over the summer.

Barry, Rosemary and Richard and all the other staff who work in the shop part-time, are very happy with the new shop premises. It certainly looks good on the inside and on the outside and it must be very nice for them to have so much more space to work in.

This autumn, as you know, has been exceptionally mild and we have had a great deal of late grazing. This has been a blessing for Man and beast – a happy extended outdoor life for them and a less stressful period for us as we avoided the last minute rush to get all the animals in. It is also nice to know that all the autumn sown crops are very well established and look very good indeed. The new sideline of producing autumn lambs has been largely successful under Steffi's management; we have had almost a 100% lambing percentage, which does not appear to be great by normal standards, but we are more than happy to have so many single lambs which tend to be stronger than twins and they have indeed shot ahead in their growth on this year's lovely autumn grass. We now expect to have little or no gap in lamb going through the shop this year.

This year's milling wheat tested extraordinarily well for bread making quality – a Hagberg falling number of 350 (250 being a minimum miller's standard) and a protein level of 12.61%. This flour is available in both Plawhatch and Tablehurst shops.

Many of you may know that Waitrose kindly donated £5,000 from the charitable funds towards the new farmers' and apprentice house development. Eleven section management personnel from our local East Grinstead Waitrose then very recently came to the farm for the day to help us to plant about 120 fruit trees in Clay Field (where our table birds range). We almost finished the job and it seems that they had a good day out. Thank you to them all. On the same theme, HSBC have offered to pay for the fruit trees that are to be planted in the turkey field. We expect to do this sometime in January.

We wish everyone a peaceful and happy Christmas.

Andrew Carnegie on behalf of all the farmers at Tablehurst

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.....

AddressPostcode

Telephone no

Email

Date

Brigitte Brown

1950 – 2006



At Brigitte's funeral and at her memorial meeting the Christian community church was full to overflowing. Yet the people giving witness to the importance of her life were merely a small representation of the hundreds of souls she touched through her life and work, and particularly at Tablehurst.

Brigitte arrived, with Peter, at Tablehurst farm in 1994. Nic and I met them soon afterwards. As Peter outlined their vision Brigitte spoke little; but always when she did one felt the weight of an absolute integrity. I remember experiencing them as people I could fully support without a qualm. The achievements of the last twelve years at Tablehurst and in the Co-operative have shown that they inspired this trust in everyone they met.

The early years were very uncertain. Brigitte had to move her three children, Katerina, Robin, and Phillippa into the farmhouse and try to raise them amidst all the upheaval. Peter's cancer recurred and she kept the family on course while he went through chemotherapy. She was a devoted mother and I know she felt that sometimes the children suffered because of all the commitments she had to meet. It became clear that the farm needed additional income, and Brigitte accepted the responsibility of caring for three people with special needs; living with the ensuing building work. On top of all this she worked in the farm shop!

Memories include her ready, friendly smile, allied with high cheek bones, silver hair, and a blue intensity of gaze. She had a natural way with young children; understanding the way in which they see the world; with the capacity for making them feel special.

She served the ideals embodied at Tablehurst in myriad ways: producing endless cakes and tea at meetings; taking responsibility for study groups: caring for every aspect. There were times when I saw the strain on the personality of serving the impulse that her individuality had chosen. The sacrifice was huge and inexorable.

When she discovered that she had breast cancer she had to step back somewhat. After she recovered from the operation she decided to study Speech Formation. It was a great joy to all of us around her to see how radiant she was at this time. I saw her class put on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at Michael Hall and could not take my eyes from her gracious Guinevere. However, persistent pain in her chest, the first signs of her final illness, meant that she could not continue.

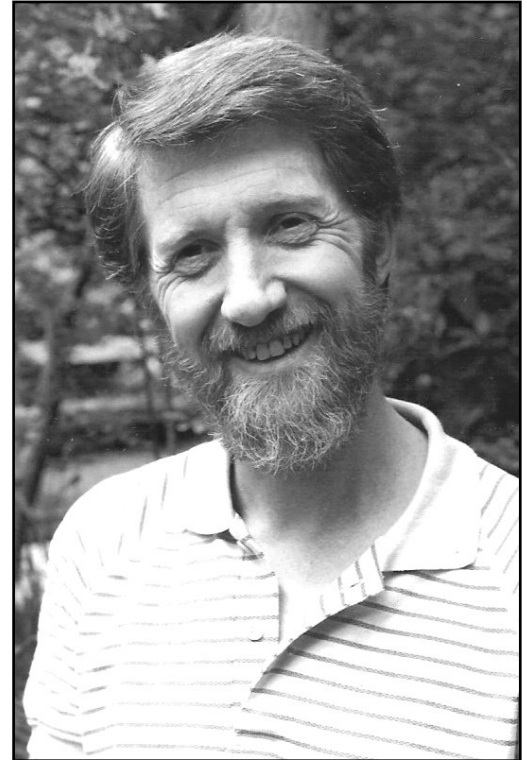
She had reconnected to the Word and her memorial meeting was full of her poetry. The poem that she sent to friends at Christmas and which was printed for her funeral comes directly from a soul who lived consciously in and with the spirit. At Tablehurst she made her ideals a reality in the world and generously left her work to us all as a legacy.

Liz Attwell

Warren Ashe

1935 - 2006

Warren, who first arrived in England from his native California in 1952 as a pupil in Class Ten at Michael Hall and then in 1962 – after training as a Waldorf teacher at Emerson College and in Stuttgart – joined the staff as a teacher of English, History and Geography in the Upper School, was one of those instrumental in setting up St. Anthony's Trust in August 1972, together with William Mann, Daniel Donahaye and Bob Wills (now the sole survivor of the original group of Trustees). The Trust was formed for the purpose of managing the anticipated profit from the housing development project at Michael Fields (which as it turned out actually made a loss). The plan was to make funds available for housing retired Michael Hall teachers (again, this came to naught because these retired teachers didn't want to live together). But St. Anthony's (named after the saint especially associated with the elderly) continued to have an involvement in the Anthroposophical Medical Practice and – in response to a specific donation – in anthroposophical art training, specifically at Tobias.



However, St. Anthony's Trust's main charitable function over the years has lain with its connection with Biodynamic Agriculture, not one that it intended to have originally. This involvement commenced from the early 1980s, when it stepped in to give a charitable context to the appeal to raise funds for the purchase of Old Plaw Hatch Farm and so maintain its status from the early 1970s as a biodynamic farm and, specifically, its milk round.

It is difficult to imagine the somewhat quixotic nature of St. Anthony's Trust, with its inherent breadth of vision and generosity of spirit, without the being of Warren Ashe. Born, significantly, on Michaelmas Day (29th September), Warren was involved in a whole manner of local initiatives pertaining in one way or another to social and economic affairs, notably the Mercury Provident Society (latterly to merge with its Dutch counterpart, Triodos Bank). Whenever anyone needed help or encouragement to bring something of this sort about in the world, Warren provided it in a faithful, non-judgemental way, so that what had previously seemed impossible – such as the raising of funds for a project, especially anything involving the dramatic arts – became achievable. Nor did he ever mind being corrected or its being suggested that his approach was not necessarily the best. A refreshing, truly cosmopolitan enthusiasm – a genuinely internationalist American – enabled this truly Michaelic spirit to sow significant seeds for the future.

Latterly, of course, Warren came to have a close involvement with the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farm Cooperative. For many years the Trust not only owned the land and buildings of Old Plaw Hatch Farm but also the farm business, which passed into the hands of the Co-op only in the last few years. It was generally Warren who would take a leading role in the legal and financial negotiations surrounding such a transaction. Finally, Warren was also very often the spokesman for the Trust, a role which many will remember who attended the occasion marking the transfer of the land and buildings of Tablehurst from Emerson College to St. Anthony's.

Simon Blaxland de Lange

Brigitte – a personal reflection by Peter Brown

As most of you will now know, Brigitte passed over the threshold on Wednesday morning the 8th November 2006.

The breast cancer she had been fighting eventually moved into her bones. We learned this just before going on a marvellous (farewell) holiday to South Africa together, last February. There she was amazingly well but struggled again when we returned. Over the summer she was mainly at home, managing little physically, except various therapies and a bit of gardening, which she loved. She went to Park Attwood Clinic a number of times, which she found very helpful and was full of praise for the way she was cared for on all levels. She stayed there for three weeks before coming home for a very special week with the family and then having to move to the East Grinstead hospital, due to finding her breathing more and more difficult. There they gave her oxygen and a special bed which made her more comfortable. I think we were all taken by surprise how quickly she deteriorated in the last couple of days. The hospital being so close made it possible for us to visit her often and I felt very lucky to be with her on the morning she died. After lying in the Chapel of Rest at the Christian Community Church in Forest Row for three days we had the funeral there on the Saturday followed by a gathering on the Sunday where memories and incidents in her life were shared. Both events were attended by many friends and were very special, moving events. Then on Saturday 25th November we had a memorial service after which we buried her ashes in the Garden of Rest, on a blustery day.

My children and I are very grateful for all those who came, for all those many who wrote or phoned and who have been so supportive in so many different ways. Things came together in such a beautiful way over this time that one couldn't help but feel that everything has been graced from above.

Brigitte was brought up in Germany with her sister and brother. She had a happy childhood enjoying her sport, her rabbits and her riding and in her teens enjoyed the Christian community camps they went on every summer. When she left school she trained to care for and teach children with learning disabilities. She loved this work, but after teaching and helping to build up a residential home for a number of years she became quite ill for a time. She decided to take a break and she went to the priest seminar for a year. This was a special time for her but she needed to stop for a year and wanted to work on the land. She arranged to work in a herb garden in Greece, but this fell through at the last minute. She went to Greece anyway where she stayed for three months visiting old mystery centres and enjoying the country. It was while she was there that she received a letter from Michael Heidenreich, a friend and priest, suggesting that she go to South Africa for a year. As she couldn't think of a reason not to go, she came down to Camphill Village Alpha near Cape Town in November 1977. This was a village with 90 adults with learning disabilities, 35 co-workers, workshops and a large farm and garden. I had already been there for two and a half years and was running the farm. We soon got to know each other, despite the initial language difficulties, and amongst other things had wonderful conversations, often over the garden gate under the moon and stars of the big South African sky! It soon became clear that she was not going back to the priest seminar! Through these conversations it also emerged that we had very similar aims in life, so when we married it was also with the conscious decision to try and fulfil these aims together, aware we would be able to achieve more together than by ourselves.

We soon had three beautiful children. Brigitte had a natural way and instinct with children and so became involved in the nursery school for a while and giving religion lessons. We lived in a community which was vibrant and trying to achieve a lot, which in turn taught us a great deal. We loved the life there but also had the ups and downs that go with any striving community. After Brigitte had been there 13 years and I over 15 we left for England hoping to find a situation where we could start or be involved in a community farm. Not a community farm as in a Camphill farm but in a larger community. We had heard some talks by Manfred Klett, the then head of the biodynamic work at the Goetheanum in Switzerland, which really inspired us. We couldn't find what we were looking for in England so joined the farm in Schloss Hamborn, near Paderborn in Germany where they were hoping to do just that. So, apart from Brigitte, who was of course in her native country, the rest of us had to learn German! It is amazing how quickly children can learn a language and how slow somebody like

me takes to learn it. This experience makes it all the more remarkable for me to see how well Brigitte was able to speak, spell and live into the English language and even write poetry in it.

So we spent three years in Schloss Hamborn. Brigitte taught some girls from the boarding school/home there how to do the tasks in a farmer's wife's household. When it became clear that we were not going to be able to create the community farm we were hoping to there, we started looking for other possibilities, which is when we were approached by Emerson College and the whole Tablehurst adventure began.

Brigitte has of course been pivotal in what we have all managed to achieve here. Many of you will have first met her serving in the shop. She had such a bright easy way with people which could at once make them relax and yet she could also lead it into meaningful conversations. Importantly, she helped carry the whole farm and everybody involved in her consciousness, she was clear what we were trying to achieve and stuck to her principals.

The last years were not easy for her in many ways. She went through quite an inner journey, dealing with the cancer and other things, but she went through it bravely and steadfastly. Going to Artemis, the speech and drama school was something she loved and was very, very special for her. It is sad she was only able to complete the one year instead of the four that I know she would have loved to have done.

Brigitte will no doubt be accompanying us closely from the spiritual world. This is a new relationship I look forward to taking into the future.

Peter Brown

Tablehurst Farmhouse Update

As a result of your generous donations we now have over £90,000 of our £120,000 target figure. There have been some especially generous donations in recent months. As was mentioned by Peter in the last newsletter Waitrose gave us £5,000, and we are still waiting to hear from one or two donors.

But £20,000 was also mentioned by Peter in his notebook as given to us by "one couple". We can now reveal that their names are Patricia and Roger Ross. In naming them we are able to say a really special thanks to them for their generosity and expression of belief in the project, both for the building and for the vision behind it. Furthermore in response to very a moving memorial gathering for Brigitte they gave another £10,000, and suggested that it might be a fitting memorial to her to name the house after her. We have agreed to do this.

With regard to the work itself we are into the final process of detailed planning and costing of the work. This is a vital stage in the process before getting started. It helps us know the order of work and how to do it most efficiently. The aim will be to focus on the part for Raphael and Steffi with a view to completing the apprentice space later when all the money is raised. The work will begin in January and start with a big clear out!

As we have mentioned in the fundraising leaflet we will be doing much of the work ourselves and there will be some opportunities for voluntary work for anyone who has skills and time. This has to be done with a view to appropriate tasks and numbers on site, but anyone interested could contact me on 07990 581 270.

Mark Haughton

Bulb Planting Workday

Thirty volunteers of every age, over three thousand bulbs, glorious late October sunshine and enough cake to feed an army. If you weren't there, you missed a wonderful day out on the farm. Hopefully everyone will be able to enjoy the fruits of our labours come the spring. Special thanks to Mark Haughton for organising the whole thing.

Chris Marshall



The new shop at Tablehurst - is this the finest butcher's shop in England?

Master Class ...

The Co-op committee is very pleased that for the second year, Mark Raffan (Michelin star chef from Gravetye Manor) will run a cookery Master Class and cater for a grand fund raising dinner. This event will be held in The Long Room at Michael Hall, Forest Row, in the spring (date to be confirmed) and you are invited to attend either the Master Class and dinner (£40 per head) or simply come along in the evening to enjoy the magnificent food and ambience (£60 per head including wine). For more information and tickets please contact Rebecca Johns 01342 825453 or email Rebecca@ruraladmin.co.uk.

... and Dinner

Christmas Opening Hours

	Plaw Hatch	Tablehurst
Thu 21st	10.00 - 18.00	9.00 - 17.00
Fri 22nd	9.00 - 18.00	9.00 - 17.00
Sat 23rd	9.00 - 18.00	9.00 - 17.00
Xmas Eve	CLOSED	
Reopens	Tue 2 Jan 10.00	Thu 11 Jan 9.00

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