

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

Summer '07

Tablehurst - new farmhouse

The thing with building is you usually have to go down before going up even where walls are already there. In February Peter, Philip from Emerson and myself navigated our way around the inside of the building with a 1.5 ton digger, wheel barrows and shovels, preparing deep trenches for concrete foundations for new load bearing partition walls and pipe work. With mounds of muddy earth and deep holes filling with water from the last of the winter rain, the inhospitable scene made it hard to imagine the home that it will become for a family and three apprentices. But it will!

The foundations now have their walls, built by Dan Ritchie with his team of brickies and labourers. He also undertook the painstaking job of "toothed out" and replacing damaged brickwork on the external walls. Replicating the "bond", (the pattern in which the bricks overlap each other in successive courses), made good use of Dan's training and experience. On the other hand Stuart, one of our residents, made a substantial contribution with a sledge hammer, demolishing some of the old walls which were redundant in the new scheme. It was a real pleasure to witness his delight and skill in the task. In a week or so from the time of writing we will start on the roof. This part of the work could be an opportunity for volunteers. If you are fit and willing give me a ring (see number below).



The building is a simple structure but there's beauty in its detail; the wormy, but generous and still sound, pine roof trusses, and the quality of the brickwork using old imperial sized bricks, often pleasantly misshapen and laid on lime mortar. The uses to which the building has been put are also revealed. In preparing for new foundations we discovered an old brick paved cow-shed floor complete with carefully graded drainage gulleys. Having paid due reverence to the good old days and ways, it took several "new" days with a jack hammer to remove it, giving further testament to its good construction! The new floor however has the advantage of being flat! And another thing; nobody bothers any more to construct truss beams with dovetails to hold the wall plate they rest on in place. This building has six and they are modestly hidden beneath a "lap joint", a feature which combined with the dovetail requires very precise chisel work. I only discovered them when replacing some rotten wood. The building's date is at



least pre first world war, if not Victorian, a time when such care was the norm applied to every construction job. Its new life as a farmhouse will rescue it from a rapidly approaching oblivion. The old tin roof which must have replaced the original tile roof only 20 or 30 years ago was letting in rain and providing a rich dampness for wall growing buddleia. Great for butterflies but lousy for the walls. Seeing its construction and narrowly escaped demise got me thinking...about buildings, people, time, change. Too many thoughts to write here, except to say I feel very grateful to be a part of this project. It affirms in me the belief that the many challenges of the future can also be tasks with joy and hope in them.

Mark Haughton; tel 07990 581 270

Take a look at the new Co-op website at:

www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

Time for Transition

The impact of burning fossil fuels on our climate is now obvious to all except a few die-hard sceptics. Our streets are choked with cars. We are fed, clothed and warmed not by the produce of the land around us but by food, goods and fuel transported hundreds and thousands of miles. There is also a growing awareness that the days of cheap oil are coming to an end - soon. However, hardly any political leaders are talking about peak oil and its ramifications, acting and planning as though cheap oil will last forever, never mind the effects on the environment.

Whether this is simple naïve ignorance or an unwillingness to address an almost impossible to imagine future it is hard to decide. While optimists talk about 20 years, a growing number of experts say the days of unlimited cheap oil could be over within just two or three years. With oil so deeply embedded in our way of life from transportation and food production to consumer products, the end of cheap oil will have a severe impact on our way of life. It is clear that a major change in the ways that we consume energy and resources is necessary, whether because of their impact on the climate or because of the cost.

Oil As Food

The transition from our current wasteful, polluting and energy intensive way of life, to one that uses energy and resources in ways that will enable our children and grandchildren to enjoy a good standard of living, is essential. It requires a whole new way of thinking, with new skills and new ways of living with each other: not only living and working more locally, for example, but also in the food choices that we make and the way that it is grown.

According to a recent White Paper by our MEP Caroline Lucas, 'Fuelling a Food Crisis – the impact of peak oil on food security', food supply now accounts for 21% of total UK energy use. She points out that we currently rely on imports to provide almost one third of the food consumed in the UK, and have one of the lowest self-sufficiency ratios in the EU. Half of all vegetables and 95% of all fruit consumed in the UK now come from overseas.

Cars OR Food

Viable alternatives to reducing consumption of oil are hard to find. Figures from the OECD show that Europe would need to convert more than 70 per cent of arable land from food production in order to raise the proportion of biofuel used in road transport to 10 per cent. Unilever, the world's second largest food company, warned last year that Britain faced soaring food prices, a shortage of staple foods and declining public health if the Government pushes ahead with plans to promote the use of biofuels.

Time for Action

While we are fortunate in Forest Row to have a community farm, for it to be able provide a year round primary food supply for the whole of our community will require much thought and planning. Transition Village Forest Row is a new project that seeks to engage the community, including existing groups and initiatives, to address and prepare for the challenges that we face. The Transition Village project makes no claim to have all the answers, but by building on the wisdom of the past and accessing the pool of ingenuity, skills and determination in our community, we believe the solutions will arise.

Starting last year in Totnes, the Transition Towns idea is spreading fast around the country to places including Bristol, Stroud and Lewes. The project intends to help us help each other to start making the transition to a less polluting, sustainable way of life, that will have the added benefit of a more connected and enlivened community.

Phase Transition

The first phase of the project is raising awareness of the issues starting with a series of films: 14th May - Crude Impact; 11th June – Energy Crossroads; 25th June – The Power of Community (Hambro Hall 8pm). The next step will be to form planning groups to create a vision for Forest Row and an action plan. If you are interested in getting involved or leading a planning group, please get in contact.

Now is the time for us to take stock. To start to re-create our future in ways that are not based on cheap, plentiful and polluting oil but with localised food, a sustainable environment and an enlivened sense of community well being.

The need for change is urgent and these changes can't and won't happen overnight. We still have some time, - if we start planning and acting now. By thinking and acting together, the transition to a way of living that can be sustained will become much more achievable. Together we must re-imagine and re-create our future.

Find out more at:

<http://transitiontowns.org/Forest-Row>

Mike Grenville mike@changingworlds.info 01342 825169

The last of Violet

March 20th 1950

VIOLET, the last cart horse in our village, left this morning. Before the war, 16 shire horses and their foals were kept here, all within a radius of four miles. It has not taken the tractor long to oust them. I remember buying a second-hand tractor in 1940. It was the first in the village. But it has taken only ten years for the transition to reach completion, and there is now not a single horse left.

And if there should ever be a shortage of vapourising oil, we could not buy our horses back again. For London eats them at the rate, I believe of, 5,000 a month. Within five years there will scarcely be a couple of hundred cart horses left in England. All of which is no doubt very progressive, as long as the oil pipeline is allowed to run through the Middle East desert.

This is not the place to discuss military strategy. But surely everybody must realise how much we are increasing our dependence on outside supplies. If there should be another war and our oil supplies were cut off, it would not be possible to turn cat's meat back into noble horses.

March 21st 1950

More trouble with modern progress. My milking machine failed to respond to the switch yesterday. We usually take half an hour to milk 14 cows, using a two-bucket unit. We start at 7.30 a.m., but 8 o'clock found us still tinkering with the engine (our efforts were unavailing) and the lorry left without our churns.

Meanwhile, the herd of un milked beasts began to get restive. A mechanic was summoned from a neighbouring market-town. After taking the petrol engine to pieces, he revealed a small brass casting which had broken – it was the one which couples the magneto to the starter.

It did not help to be told he could not mend it and that there was nothing for it but to wire the makers for a new part. The cows were now bellowing with discomfort. It was obvious that if we left them un milked any longer we should cause them considerable damage.

It took me another half-hour to find the old milking buckets and stools. Then, at 11 o'clock, two of us began to milk. The first heifer I approached kicked the pail, whereas she always stands quiet to the machine. It was obvious that she missed its rhythmic pulsing. However, I eventually got my hands to the udder. Then I discovered they were so unused to milking that they ached after five minutes.

It took us over an hour and a half to milk the cows, and we were so clumsy that our yield dropped a gallon and a half, though we were milking nearly four hours after the usual time. It is only two years since I installed a milking machine. But I know that, were it to remain broken for one week, my cowman would have left by the end of it.

March 22nd 1950

Another 10 years will find cart horses as rare as bison and hand-milkers as scarce as jugglers: all of which is alright, I suppose, as long as the tractor tank is full and the milking machine responds to the switch. But if one power station breaks down thousands of milking machines are useless. It would be ridiculous if, in a new war, we found our farms were thus as vulnerable as our factories.

In fact, the farms are becoming far too vulnerable. It would be a wise farmer who bought in one of those wood-burning engines such as the French improvised during the war. Personally, I intend to install a windmill plant for generating electricity. One day it might be the only machine in the village to work.

Reprinted from "Journal of a Dairy Farmer", Country Living, April 1950.

With thanks to Richard Evans



Winter and spring on Tablehurst Farm





Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

In the short time since the last newsletter plenty has been happening down on the farm! The wet winter has been followed by beautiful dry hot sunny weather. It was wonderful because we could sow our spring crops but then it carried on and on and on. The crops started to look more and more unhappy; some of the undersown pasture dried up and died, the grass stopped growing and we had to start grazing fields we had put aside for silage as well as water the plum trees we planted in the poultry field last winter by hand. Fortunately the rain has come at last so things should start to grow again. However, fortuitously, some organic fields have become available for rent for the summer very close by in Ashurst Wood and we will now be able to ensure that we have enough forage for the winter.

The sheep have lambed and been shorn and they all look good. The cattle are all out and have their shiny coats back after the winter. The pigs are also out but up at Springhill this year. The poultry are fine, but the loss of one of our beautiful movable poultry houses, which the wind picked up and threw into some trees at the edge of our field, has complicated life a bit. We have to keep the chicks down at the farm a week longer than previously before bringing them up to the field. This has meant finding a larger space for them. We will attempt to repair the badly damaged house in the field but at the moment we have no time. As has happened in previous years in spring, the crows have been hungry and daring and attack and kill some of the younger chickens; they even fly into the houses through the pop holes to do their dirty work. Previous attempts to stop it have been in vain, so this year we are spanning quite a large area outside the houses, where the feeders are, with bird netting. This works very well and is actually less work than we originally thought.

Andrew broke his foot a month ago, which has meant that he has only been able to do office work from home, much to his frustration. That has also meant that we have been short on the farm so I have been unable to do as much work on the building as was originally planned. Mark Haughton has been on it a fair bit though and we have had a couple of brick layers working on Saturdays. We hope to start on the roof next week. The wonderful news is that our fundraising has just had a significant boost. A German company, AG Software has donated us £36,000 and will match fund up to £18,000 more, pound for pound if we can raise it. I would therefore like to appeal one more time to help us raise this last £18,000. It will ensure that we are able to properly complete this project and that we have the house for Steffi and Raph and the three apprentice rooms and kitchen. The last months Steffi and Raph have moved out of the caravan into rented accommodation and their baby is due in June.

Another development is that Andrew and Bernie took us all by surprise by announcing their wish to move to France together in September. We all feel very happy for them but very sorry for ourselves! Andrew in his quiet way has been a very important part of the team and our three residents all love him. Bernie also has been involved and supportive of the farm for so long it is hard to imagine it without her. Still, things move on and now the important thing is to find the right people to replace them. We have advertisements out in the organic / biodynamic websites and newsletters. The farm finances are still stretched after the building developments of last year but the shop sales are up as budgeted so we must patiently wait to get rid of our overdraft!

We had our farm walk last weekend, as advertised in the last newsletter, in pouring rain at Springhill. As a result there were not so many people but it also seems that many just forgot about it. The question is - what is the best method of reminding people as many seem disappointed they had forgotten? We are open to suggestions! Maybe an e-mail would be appropriate for many?

Peter Brown

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.....

Plaw Hatch - keeping the balance

Plaw Hatch farm is 200 acres, of which 150 is useable and 130 is worth talking about for producing food. From this 15 acres is dedicated to the garden. Each year we want to get the best from the land to maintain our livestock and crops in the best condition and also to make sure we don't deplete fertility of the land for coming years. Through rotations, stocking densities and careful manuring its possible to achieve this. If any one of these is neglected or the weather is really unfavourable then the system breaks down and can take years to recover. Often we are tempted to squeeze more from the land, but all too often a couple of extra cows, pigs kept on the same bit of land for too long, poor cultivations at the wrong time, can tip the balance and suddenly you have a lot to worry about. It seems to me that the farm is sensitive with its sandy soils and benefits most from having minimal disturbance.

A Biodynamic farm is typically a mixed farm for the good reason that each animal can contribute, interact and give different attributes to the whole farm system. Keeping the right balance of animals is important for so many aspects of the farm. Its nothing new, 50 years ago most farms were mixed, well balanced and were focused on supporting local communities.

Of all the animals the cow is the queen of composting, being most efficient at converting twigs, grass and straw to useable compost within 72 hours. In addition there is the milk. Ayurveda asserts that a cow represents the mother or mother Nature. She always provides more than what is needed. A cow has four quarters, one for the baby calf, one for the farmer, one for the guest that may come and one for the worship of the divine.

The pigs with their long digging noses, so selective of what they eat, turn there nose up at mouldy bread but love chicken manure. For us they also love the whey from the cheese making, so they fit in well here. They are good for ploughing land not suitable for a tractor and clearing bits of woodland. In return we have the pork.

All my injuries have been from working with sheep, whether back problems or more recently some broken ribs. Of all the domestic animals they are the most challenging to tame, it can take years of experience to move sheep in the right direction (even with floss!!) They are best in a big group and most friendly to one another but can often surprise us with sudden death. But they are a fantastic complement to the grazing on the farm, being able to eat not just the grass and weeds down to a low level, encouraging fresh new tillers, but provide an even distribution of manure, they can live outside all year round and there feet are like a harrow levelling of the ground. They can produce the most amazing fleece and their lambs of course are for the meat.

The hen for us provides the eggs not the meat. Their manure is high in nitrogen and a valuable complement to the manure heaps. In the right environment (in an orchard) they can keep preying insects controlled and the ground cleared. Eating whole grain they are the most efficient converters on the farm to producing meat or eggs. Demeter standards recommend 50 birds / acre as a sustainable number.



At Plaw Hatch we have:

45 milking cows giving @ 140,000li milk each year

1 beef bull just reaching maturity at 5 years

25 followers of different ages(including beef animals)

2 sows and a boar giving @ 30 piglets / year

15 ewes giving @ 20 lambs / year

300 laying hens giving 50,000 eggs / year

The Garden producing tons ?? of fruit and vegetables

Keeping the right balance of animals is also dependant on who is working / living on the farm. We all have favourite breeds and types (Susan loves sheep and pigs, Ray is good with the hens, I enjoy the cows, Andy enjoys delivering the milk I think!, Peter is loving the challenge of running the garden) but more importantly we have different capacities within ourselves to manage the animals and the land.

All these things considered a natural balance takes place within the farm organism, which typifies a mixed farm. I feel privileged, for us it provides a lovely environment to live and work as a community.

Earn your own Michelin star!

Following the success of last year's event, the Co-op is once again offering a unique opportunity to spend a day cooking with Mark Raffan, Michelin-starred head chef and co-owner of Gravetye Manor (pictured. with last year's kitchen crew).



Alternatively, if you prefer eating to cooking, why not join us in the evening for the fruits of their labours at the Co-op fund-raising dinner in the Long Room at Michael Hall? The dinner will feature seasonal produce from both farms with specially chosen biodynamic wines included in the price. Tickets are £60 per person for dinner and wine, reduced to £40 per person for participants in the cookery masterclass plus one guest.

Please support this Co-op fund raising initiative, and have an enjoyable event into the bargain. For information and tickets, contact Rebecca Johns, 01342 825453 or rebecca@ruraladmin.co.uk

As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, building work is now underway on the new accommodation at Tablehurst Farm. Funding for the work has just received a huge boost with a donation of about £36,000 from a German organisation who issue grants to for a wide range of purposes.

In addition to the grant, they have said that they are prepared to give a further £18,000 in match-funding if we can raise the same amount ourselves. In total, this would be sufficient to complete both the house for Raphael and Steffi and the accommodation for our apprentices. We are therefore appealing one last time for funds for this project.

Please do help if you can.



£1 = £2

£10 = £20

£100 = £200

£10 = £20

£1 = £2

St Anthony's Trust
Tablehurst Farmhouse Fund
Gibbons & Mannington
Chartered Accountants
7-9 Wellington Square
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www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

Co-op Officers

Brian Swain, Chairman	824740
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John Summers, Treasurer	822014

Tablehurst Farm Walk at Springhill Farm
Meet at Springhill (first left off Weir Wood Reservoir road) at 3pm on Sunday 17 June