

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

Autumn '07

## Farewell to old friends

In early October Andrew and Bernie leave for a new and very different life in France. No doubt many of us will be going to visit them there in the months and years ahead. They will be **greatly** missed here, not only for what they have done over so many years, but as friends.

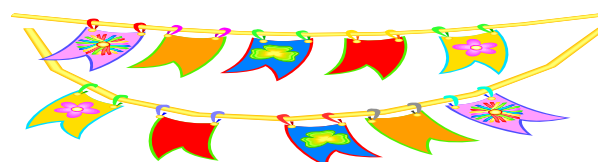


Andrew I first met as the farmer at Plaw Hatch when I came to Tablehurst and I feel very lucky to have had him as a colleague the last years. Andrew has been quiet, humble and supportive with clear views and opinions and fully behind what we are trying to achieve here. One could not ask for much more than that!

I remember writing my thanks to Bernie in a previous newsletter a number of years ago when she stopped working full time on the farm and started at Emerson College. Since then she has continued to keep the income side of the farms accounts, to be involved in events like our barn dances, and to be an active participant in our management group as a director. One could not ask for much more than that either!

So, from all on the farm we thank them and wish them all the best for the future.

Peter Brown



An Invitation  
from Andrew and Bernie

**We are having an  
“au revoir” get-together  
at Tablehurst on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup>  
starting at 3pm to celebrate both  
the time we have spent working in  
this area and all the friends we  
have made over the years.**

# Farming 80 years ago

In the last newsletter, we published an extract from a 1950 edition of *Country Living*. It prompted this response ...

The reprint from "Country Living" made me wonder if you would be interested in the recollections of a child brought up on a small farm in East Sussex in the 1920s. Between 1923 and 1924, my first recollection of the farm was a tall Oxford marmalade jar standing on the corner of the sink in the pantry next door to our nursery. The jar was half full of what looked like a thick black liquid with a stick in it for stirring. After seeing it many times, I asked the nursemaid who was looking after us children what it was? She was also helping in the dairy. That, she said, was molasses for giving to the cows to lick after they had calved.

The second vivid remembrance I have is the squealing of the piglets one morning early in the spring. I believe I had heard this before, but this time I asked what it was? I had seen a cord stretched between two trees beyond the orchard at the back of the house and a tall, hairy man with a dark, long, presumably bloodstained leather apron round his waist and his mate dressed the same. They were working round a large vat over a bonfire.

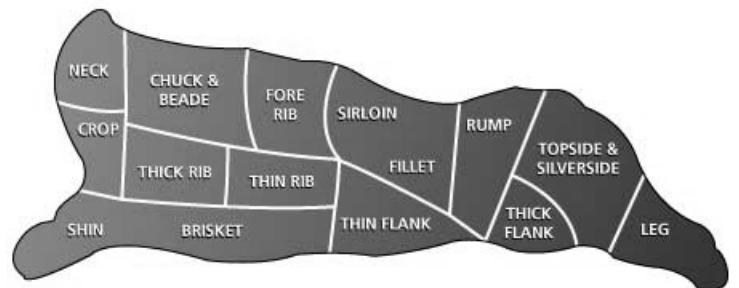
I was told that the piglets from the huge "large black" sows we had, had to go to market and it was explained to John, my brother, and me that the cord went through the back legs of the piglets, that they were pushed along the wire: at the end, their throats were cut and the blood streamed into a vat and the piglets coats were singed over the bonfire. This may be an inaccurate picture of the process, but it was more than 80 years ago.

Nowadays, it would be thought wrong to expose young children to such experiences – but this was a farm, and this is how food was produced and animals went to market.

Anne Thomson

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## Not just steaks and roasts ...



One of the distinctive characteristics of the farm shop at Tablehurst is that nearly all the meat we sell comes straight from the farm. A consequence of this is that we can only obtain our supplies of meat in units of a whole animal. Unfortunately, demand is not so balanced: for the prime cuts, it far outstrips supply, whereas the more homely cuts – in particular braising and stewing steak, mince, and burgers – remain rather less popular, despite a pricing policy designed to help address the problem. Offal is even more unfashionable, and much of this is currently sold for pet food due to the lack of demand from humans.

### How to make a superb beef stew

Brown some diced leg of beef in oil in a heavy pan. Take your time and get it really brown. Add some onions and garlic, cook a bit and stir in a little flour to thicken. Add a skinned, diced tomato and enough liquid to cover the meat – water is fine, stock, beer or wine is better – and leave to simmer on a very low heat for at least three hours. Now chuck in some coarsely diced vegetables, e.g. carrots, mushrooms, peppers, turnips, celeriac, celery (whatever you like really) and some herbs if you have them. Simmer for another hour and serve with a jacket potato. Who needs steaks or roasts?

We would love to sell *all* our meat direct to individual shoppers, but this is only possible if we can better balance demand. So we are asking you, our customers, to think about what you buy, to expand your horizons and to try something new, particularly among our wonderful range of beef cuts. Our shop team will be pleased to advise you on which cut is best for which type of cooking.

# School Farm – Project Leader(s) Needed

The idea of a “school farm” – a place where classes of school children can stay for a week to experience a working farm – is now a step closer to realisation at Tablehurst. Collaboration with Emerson College and St Anthony’s Trust, together with some recently identified seed funding, means that it may be possible to get such an initiative off the ground as early as 2008. The aim of the project would be to provide a rich experience of farm life for classes of about 30 children for about 40 weeks each year. To attract schools to the project, the programme of activity will be developed to support the national curriculum in as many areas as possible. School visits to farms are becoming increasingly common in the UK, but residential facilities are still very rare.

A support group of interested individuals is beginning to form around this initiative, and we would welcome additional participants, but for the project to proceed to the next stage, we need one, or possibly two, project leaders. These individuals need to be willing to take on a three month appointment (on a paid basis) as soon as possible to explore the feasibility of the school farm in more depth. Research will be needed into similar initiatives elsewhere, sources of funding, sources of expert advice, practical planning and costing of the project, development of educational content and exploration into how to make the project attractive and financially viable to schools. At the end of the three months, a decision will be taken on whether to rent a building at Emerson College and implement the school farm. However, this decision will be dependent on the outcome of the research, so further work for the project leader cannot be guaranteed beyond the end of this year. This notwithstanding, we are seeking a project leader who is seriously interested in pursuing the school farm through to realisation. The ideal individual will have some expertise in education (our target children will be in the top end of primary school), or in farming. Initiative and the ability to complete challenging tasks with limited guidance and little or no supervision will be essential.

If you are interested in joining our support group or in leading the project, please contact me (details on back page).

Chris Marshall

## Stepping Down

This is an announcement that I will be stepping down from the role of Co-op Committee Chairman. At the AGM on September 21st I will formally step down but will stand as committee member. I am looking forward to new people joining the committee this Autumn to take up new initiatives to support and expand the work of our farms. My time in the chair has been eventful and fulfilling as we have seen the farms successfully come out of some rough times to demonstrate what biodynamic farming can accomplish with strong community support behind it. I am confident that this support will grow in new ways as more people realise what an amazing asset our community has in the farms and the Co-op. I hope to see you all at the AGM.

With Warm Regards, Brian Swain

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## A new shop manager at Plaw Hatch ...

Hello, My name is Alex and I took over management of the Plaw Hatch Farm shop from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. I moved with my wife Tamara and children Dylan 3 and Sofia 1 onto the farm last week. We are living in half of the farmhouse next to the Venthams.

It has been a busy time what with starting a new job, moving out of our old house in Crowborough and moving into a partly finished new house on the farm. Thanks to everyone who made it possible and in such a small time frame! At the moment I am learning the job again. I worked in the shop over six years ago so some of you may recognise me. I have many plans for the shop but for the moment am concentrating on getting to grips with the different processes involved. My main areas of importance are quality of customer service and the produce. We work as a team in the shop and we want to supply as much local biodynamic and organic produce as possible. We also want to reduce road and air miles on the goods we import and so we are starting to cut back on things from far abroad and trying to buy locally wherever possible.

We started selling freshly squeezed juices last Saturday and hope to introduce hot drinks soon, the weather is already nudging us in that direction! I am currently recruiting for full time staff as some of our workers are going to University or moving onto pastures new. If you have any comments or enquiries please email me at alexbaxter\_plawhatch@yahoo.co.uk or speak to me in the shop. I am there six days a week and look forward to seeing you!

Alex Baxter

If I had to give this year a name, I'd call it *the Year of the Volunteers*. Here's what they have to say about working in the garden at Michael Hall ...

Dorothea Leber



## Michael Hall Garden ...

"There are few things more pleasing to my spirit than picking sweet peas in Michael Hall Garden with the early morning sun on my back."

Chris

A true labour of love. Weeding the spinach on all fours with a knife made me appreciate each leaf that I eat.

Karin



"My chosen shift is the early morning one. By the time that I arrive at 7.00 Dorothea has usually been working for an hour so I join in with the task at hand: picking flowers for the mixed bunches; shining cosmos daisies, sky blue cornflowers, delicate larkspur, fragrant marjoram, hairy prickly bright yellow 'black eyed Susan' heavenly smelling sweet peas..... Then on to dark green spinach and rainbow chard the leaves of which snap off with a satisfying crunch when you get your thumb down in the right

position and twist. Into the glasshouse to harvest basil - on hands and knees immersed in the pungent aroma. Meanwhile Dorothea has been filling a box with leaves for her famous salad bags and I am given the delightful task of gathering the lions and dragons (courgette and nasturtium flowers) for the finishing touch. Climbing beans next, smooth, dark purple French or slightly rough flat runners hiding behind their leaves, some high, some low, these are picked and dropped into the bucket tied around my hips. In no time it is 9.00 and John will be arriving for the Seasons order - is everything there? If so, the shop must be stocked and Plaw Hatch and Dave's order need to be prepared. My shift is over and I return home with the day ahead of me, senses and muscles well exercised and satisfied."

Caroline



## Cherry Gardens – a new, local BD enterprise

We have been kindly offered space to say something of our move from Plaw Hatch to Cherry Gardens Farm in Groombridge and of how things have gone in the first few months. We are very lucky to find ourselves here in a beautiful place. The farm sits high and exposed above Groombridge with views out to the north, and west back to the Forest, surrounded and subdivided by mature mixed native hedging so a haven for bird life. The soil is full of potential, an island on the top of this hill of a lighter sandier loam which with care is perfect for vegetable growing. There are 25 acres in all and we worked initially clearing and cultivating so that we could establish green manures to build soil fertility. We are working on an extensive rotation over 10 years with two 2 year breaks for fertility building crops as we have very little access to animal manures.

# ... the Year of the Volunteers



Volunteering in the garden is:  
crawling on your knees  
weeding weeds,  
sunshine on your bare back  
soaked socks because of the hole in your shoes.  
One amazingly little red strawberry  
flaming flamboyant  
in between an acre of greenliness.  
One red poppy, overseeing the fields of leeks,  
equal to the star on a general's shoulder.  
Hidden in your sleeves, intense smells  
astonishingly evaporating on unexpected moments,  
overpowering in essence, Chanel, Joop and others of those.  
Take that home: brise de tomato  
leek No 5  
vanguer Elegance de beetroot ...  
Thus is volunteering in the garden.

Edwin

...framed by an arched building that gives a mysterious and beckoning invitation ... to walk into something like a Monet painting. Wendy



Rows of spinach and weeds stand before me. Somewhat overwhelmed by the task, I sift through identifying which greenery is to thrive here and which is to compost and benefit that growth. I ponder with the odd snail or spider the parallel to the stuff I keep and periodically deweed, and the other stuff that condenses down making me stronger and more nutritious. It doesn't take long to realise that I am one with spinach. Amber



A hidden sanctuary, an island of peace, calm and sanity away from the turbulence of modern day life, bursting with life force and abundance, colour, fragrance and bird song. A precious opportunity to be caressed by the healing rays of the morning sun, touch the dark living earth, the morning dew on succulent leaves, ripe vegetables and fruit, grateful for simply being alive.

Zwi

The spray preparations have been applied over the whole area and we have bought a series of flowforms to help us with the stirrings so that we can apply them more frequently. After a three year conversion period we will be fully biodynamic and able to market our produce under the 'Demeter' logo. Planning permission for 9 large polytunnels and a barn went through very smoothly and both projects are about to start. We're about to open the farm shop officially on 6<sup>th</sup> September, though we've been open for the last couple of weeks for the PYO plums. We've had an amazing crop which was very rewarding after many weeks spent working in the orchard; clearing brambles and deadwood, pruning trees and thinning fruit. In the past Cherry Gardens was a hugely popular place for all sorts of PYO vegetables and fruit and many local people have come back to see what's going on. They've been very welcoming and full of encouragement, and glad to see the place working again. This autumn we replant all kinds of soft fruit specifically for PYO as it is much in demand here as well as being an easy and accessible way for people to come out onto the farm which we want to encourage. We have grown some crops for this autumn and with the polytunnels we can continue into the later part of this year, and then focus on next season for a proper full year's cropping. Please feel free to come and have a look around, you'll be very welcome!

Kate & Jonathan

# News from the farms ...

## Plaw Hatch

Well I'm not generally one to talk about the weather !!, but this year has been an exception, so incredibly wet with little opportunity to make hay and harvest the cereals, but plenty of grass, in fact more grass than I have ever experienced for the summer months. Cows love and thrive off grass and so milk has been plentiful and cows fat and content. We baled the last of the hay today 1<sup>st</sup> Sept (only 2 months late!) We have plenty of it but quality is poor. This I'm sure will impact on the winter milk.

The cows, the sheep, pigs, hens are all but a small part of the activities at Plaw Hatch although they do dominate the most of the land.. It is such a great relief to now have a full team. With Peter in the Garden, at last living on the farm at least for now in a mobile home. Susan in the Dairy a bit over-run with all the milk this year. And now the arrival of Alex and Tammy to take care of the farm shop which has been without a manager since May. For the last 3 months we have been building / converting / moving everything around to make more accommodation. Our house which used to contain the farm office and utility room is now successfully divided into two, to accommodate Alex and Tammy. The Students and summer helpers now have a large kitchen to share and many more rooms all under one roof. All this has been quite a distraction from the farm activities as we strive to do the work ourselves and save on costs. But its been worth it as we now have a complete team all reasonably young except Andy who is ageing fast as he enters his 7<sup>th</sup> year delivering milk. I feel that together we can share the responsibility of the farm, to provide the best produce we can for the community (whatever the weather) and offer training and opportunities for young could-be farmers. We all share the same drive and interest to develop the farm into a better place for everyone... lots of challenges and hopefully lots of fun.

Tom Ventham

## Tablehurst

After all the general predictions of a sizzling summer, we got one of the wettest on record. The early dry spring months led to a grass shortage quite quickly and we were very fortunate to be offered 100 acres of organic land in Ashurst Wood for three months. The result has been the biggest stockpile of silage on record and a lot of fat contented cattle and sheep.

The cereal harvest is just about over and once again our investment in a batch drier two years ago has proved invaluable. And the combine was more or less trustworthy throughout! Our crop of barley was, for the

second year running, better than other cereals. It is unfortunate that the milling wheat has been rained on so much which usually reduces its quality but we will see...when the test results come back.

All the livestock have done really well these last months and we have had no unusual problems in any area. Foot and mouth was a scare for a while and we were unable to slaughter for one week while the movement restrictions were in place. Chicken production is close to our optimum capacity at around 190 - 200 a week. The house cow, Lucy, has recently calved, so we are back on home produced milk for breakfast again.

As some of you know, we had a well attended summer barn dance in early July and once again we will be having our traditional Michaelmas dance on September 29<sup>th</sup>. Last week Raphael and Steffi had their wedding celebration and christening for daughter, Hanna, with guests from all over the world, it seemed! Luckily it was the sunniest and warmest day of the week, probably of the whole summer in fact.

There are a number of changes on the personnel front. We say good-bye to Sven, who has been an apprentice this last year; we all wish him well in his next step at agricultural college in Germany. He has learned some English at last and so we are just beginning to benefit from his dry humour. We also say good-bye to Matina and Anna from Austria who have been with us for the last three months and we thank them for their willingness to tackle almost any job they have not done before.

Till, from Germany, has joined us till the New Year and we will soon be joined by an English apprentice, Gaia, who will be here for the two year course. Duncan remains and is about to start year two of the apprenticeship course.

With Andrew and Bernie leaving in early October, the farm welcomes Neil Coomber to the permanent staff team; he will take over the poultry and nurse the machinery with his mechanical skills.

Finally, we are lucky to have found an experienced couple, Max and Lucy and baby son Noah, to take over the residential home in the New Year. Charlotte will take care of the home with a community service volunteer from Germany, Sandia, until then, after which she will move into other farm accommodation and start up a new venture next to the shop, which will provide a range of "treats" for visitors and customers.

P.S. If you see a young person on a bicycle that seems to be going faster than it should in Forest Row, it will be one of our young people on an electric bike checking livestock at Kidbrook or Springhill.

Andrew Carnegie

# Co-op fund-raising masterclass and dinner

On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October, Michael Hall will once again be host to the Co-op's fundraising masterclass and dinner. Mark Raffan, Michelin-starred head chef of the Gravetye Manor Hotel and Restaurant has again agreed to lead the masterclass – an all-day business during which Mark attempts to cook a brilliant meal for the evening's guests despite the assistance of a dozen or so enthusiastic amateurs. As a participant in this exercise last time around, I can confirm that it is great fun, and a really fascinating insight into serious cooking. **Places on the masterclass are strictly limited and selling fast, so apply now if you are interested in participating.**

Once Mark and his merry men and women have done their work, a superb dinner will be served in the lovely surroundings of the Long Room at Kidbrooke Mansion. Organic and biodynamic wines are included in the price of the meal, as is live entertainment. We hope that this can be a really memorable social occasion and as such a really positive way to raise funds for the Co-op. So please gather together a few friends and join us for a very special evening.

Tickets for the dinner are £60 per person. If you join the masterclass, you get both the cooking experience *and* the dinner for a discounted price of £40. Tickets are available from Helen – please call her on 01342 312904 or email [hmmcd123@btinternet.com](mailto:hmmcd123@btinternet.com).

## Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October, Michael Hall School

### 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, PO Box 653, Forest Row, RH18 5XA.

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

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

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

### Manya Parkinson

We regret to announce the recent death of Manya Parkinson. Manya was a friend of the farms, and known to many particularly at Tablehurst through her long term involvement in the farm study groups.

We are also able to announce that Manya made generous bequests to both farms in her will. These are currently subject to probate, but should in the future make a real practical difference to the farms – a wonderful gesture by which we can all remember her.

Project leader sought for our new "school farm" initiative. See page 3

# Diary Dates

Tablehurst Barn Dance and Barbecue  
29 Sep, 8pm

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Co-op AGM  
Hambro Hall, Forest Row  
21 September, 8pm  
All welcome

Chef's Masterclass & Dinner  
6 October  
See page 7 for details

## Job Opportunities at Plaw Hatch

**Dairy Assistant** : Required to work in our Dairy processing our own milk into yoghurts, etc. All training will be provided. Enquiries to : [suscram@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:suscram@yahoo.co.uk)

**Shop Staff**: Required to work in our Farm Shop full time. Must be prepared to work some Saturdays. Some heavy lifting involved.

**Assistant Shop Manager**: Required to work alongside our manager sharing responsibility for our Farm Shop.

Excellent customer service and communication skills needed for these demanding but exciting positions. An interest and knowledge of organic / biodynamic produce an advantage. Enquiries phone Alex on 01342 810201 or 07779 439016

**Milkman** (women most welcome!): Required to deliver our produce 3 mornings a week. An early start, but the rest of your day free, for those who enjoy getting up with the birds. Enquiries phone Andy on 07868 661744

Please send all applications to:  
Old Plaw Hatch Farm  
Sharpthorne, RH19 4JL

Unfortunately none of the above positions is live-in.

## Newsletter news

The Co-op newsletter is now available by post (shareholders only), in the farm shops and Seasons, direct by email or to download from our website (address below). Now, a few requests:

### Shareholders

If we deliver to you by post, please can you let me know if we are not up to date with your address details. Also, you might like to consider switching to email delivery as this saves the Co-op on postage costs. All I need is an email with your email address to [farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk)

### Everybody

If you would like to be added to our email circulation list, just send your email address to [farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk)

Many thanks Chris Marshall

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### Newsletter Editor and General Co-op Enquiries

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15 Riverside, Forest Row, RH18 5HB

Tablehurst & Plaw Hatch Community Farm,  
PO Box 653, Forest Row, RH18 5XA

### Farms

Plaw Hatch Farm Shop 810201  
Tablehurst Farm Shop 823173

### Co-op Officers (at least until the AGM)

Brian Swain, Chairman 824740  
Oliver Fynes-Clinton, Secretary 823966  
John Summers, Treasurer 822014

Old Plaw Hatch Farm, Sharpthorne, West Sussex, RH19 4JL  
Tablehurst Farm, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5DP

[www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk](http://www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk)