

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH

COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

AUTUMN 2012



The Organic Food Awards 2012 were announced as part of this year's Organic September, Europe's biggest celebration of all things organic. Now in their 24th year, the Soil Association Organic Food Awards recognise and celebrate the highest quality organic food and drink. The awards are among the most prestigious and widely respected in the UK food sector.

Last year we entered our Wild Bramble Fruit Yoghurt, receiving a Commended Award. This year we were contacted by the Soil Association, asking us to enter, as our yoghurt had been commended by consumers. What a wonderful community we have supporting us! We also decided to enter our 50/50 flour (half wholemeal, half white - we find it makes delicious bread), and some of our hens eggs, while Tablehurst entered a fore rib of beef. To our delight, all four entries won awards!



Winner, Best Dairy Product: Plaw Hatch Yoghurt

Highly Commended: Tablehurst Fore Rib of Beef

Commended: Plaw Hatch 50/50 Flour

Commended: Plaw Hatch Eggs

It felt important that Demeter produce was represented at the awards to raise the profile of biodynamics, and it was good to see that we weren't the only ones - Hophurst Biodynamic Farm won the Pork category.

Judging in all categories was by blind tasting, with products rated according to smell, texture, appearance, taste and overall 'yumminess'. It took 3 days to judge over 500 entries in 28 categories. What a gruelling task that must have been!



Is this the new farm team at Tablehurst?

All is revealed on the back page ...

My first reflection on receiving these awards is wonder that while producing such a diverse range we can strive to steward healthy land and animals and produce high quality food. Then I am reminded that it's possible because these factors are so fundamentally and inextricably interconnected.

For a full list of Organic Food Award Winners and profiles visit www.soilassociation.org/foodawards

Tali Eichner

Plaw Hatch Farm News

Four months is not long in farming time to reflect upon any changes. It is really only one season in any given year, and as we are working on the long term here, it is really no time at all. And yet there has been a momentous change on the farm in that time, one that needs both acknowledging, and for you our community, a more in depth explanation.

Tom Ventham had milked and cared for this herd of MRI cows pretty much single-handedly for 11 years. From June 2012, after he left, the farm team (in extraordinary circumstances) agreed upon an 'interim plan' which meant that 3 people would now share the responsibility of milking and caring, with one of those solely responsible to hold the herd from a heart space as well as from the husbandry perspective. The plan had the full support of the Farm Directors, the Co-op, the Farm Team at Tablehurst and our wider Management Team.

John Twyford, Merijn Van den Hout and Maya Lock made up the 'interim plan'. All three had worked with Tom to varying degrees. John spent his 6 month BD Course placement here observing and learning Tom's ways of herd management and how to ensure that the animals experience as little stress as possible which plays a huge part in their health and wellbeing. Maya spent her school summer holidays milking the cows three years ago and since that time has acquired an intimate knowledge of the present herd. Merijn, after his Warmonderhof training and several years of milking experience, arrived in Tom's final weeks and gleaned a huge amount of knowledge in a very short space of time. He came with a desire to be a 'Tom' and to take on the responsibility of a herd, their overall management and to put all that he had learned into practice.

For the farm it was a huge shift in the way of 'holding' as we moved from one person to three. It demanded an immediate need and commitment to open and honest communication for the team to work in harmony, and it asked this of the whole farm as we embarked upon a new way of being and working with one another as well as the land and the animals.

We always said we would review the interim plan after three months to assess where everyone was, how the herd was faring, what needed to happen to improve communication, how secure were people in their roles etc etc. We were also aware that perhaps we needed to consider going through the whole recruitment process again and how did that sit with us.

At three months it was clear that the plan with some initial teething problems was working. Merijn had taken on the challenge of holding this herd in his heart with tremendous enthusiasm, honouring Tom's legacy of as little stress as possible. Maya brings with her the knowledge of the change of seasons plus her quiet, patient and attentive ways in all that she does. John has reconnected with the land, the herd and the farm in ways that were not possible for him to do before, and he is relishing this connection. He and Johannes are working very closely looking at how we have managed the land and debating whether there are ways from past practises to present day methods that will enhance the fertility of our fields. Tali and Merijn are in constant discussion about milk and calves and the health of the herd. Maya is with us until the end of December after which time she has decided to go travelling the world.

And so a little time after the three months had elapsed the Farm Team and Directors decided to make this plan a permanent one. Merijn was asked if he would consider staying on for a further year to consolidate his training and to be the main herdsman for that time. He has agreed to do this and continues to integrate himself more in the decision making and running of the farm. Obviously Maya is leaving in December but by then the herd will have transitioned into the barns for the winter months and between John and Merijn the milking will be shared.

We have been so very blessed by how the right people came to the farm when they were needed. Blessed by their commitment to staying and contributing all their skills and knowledge. They were not easy times at the beginning and as a Director I need to honour their openness to flow with a process that was not clear for any of us and one that felt very raw.

In many ways being prepared to hold the interim plan has been a catalyst behind what I sense to be a different way of doing things at Plaw Hatch. We have all needed to find our voices and more importantly we have had to learn (and continue to learn) to listen to one another, to honour our differences, to slow down in decision making or at least in the 'doing' or the 'getting things done', and most important of all to find ways to stay true to the farm, ourselves and our overall purpose and vision.

Of course we still have our differences and sometimes I am sure we all have moments when we do not do 'life' as well as we can. In these moments perhaps it is important to remember that we are not just in the process of learning to be better gardeners, farmers, cheese-makers or shop keepers, but we are also here to learn how to live, to work and to love one another and love by its very nature asks more of us.

Liz Charnell

SHARE APPLICATION

I 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, Providence Cottage, North Lane, West Hoathly, West Sussex RH19 4QG.

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

AddressPostcode

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

AGM Report

"Annual General Meeting" must be one of the duller phrases in the English language, but the Co-op AGM a couple of weeks ago was quite the opposite. About 80 of us gathered in the barn at Plaw Hatch on a crisp, beautiful, sunny September morning to hear the stories of our farms over the last year. And those stories were really inspiring. Despite the most challenging circumstances, with Tom and Julia leaving and the tragic death of Alan Hope, Plaw Hatch was able to report its best profit for years, and better still, that every part of the enterprise is contributing positively. The new management group has now settled down into a strong team and, as reported on page 2, the immediate challenge of replacing Tom as primary carer for the dairy herd has been resolved.



At Tablehurst, the financial picture was slightly more challenging, with a small loss of £8,000 reported. However, the directors emphasised that this is because the farm is investing heavily in its infrastructure and facilities rather than because of any underlying trading problem. Major initiatives this year have included the new solar panels, extensive property repairs, the new concrete road, and a pension scheme for permanent staff. The farm also experienced a big change of personnel when Raphael and Steffi left last winter.

I have been to many Co-op AGMs over the years, but have never before walked away afterwards with quite such a positive sense that our beloved farms are in good hands, that the community is close by, and that real strides are being made towards the ideals of sustainable, biodynamic, community farming. The strongest image I took away from both farms was of enterprises developing healthily through the deep collaboration of many people, rather than the achievements of any single individual. This is surely a lesson for us all and an essential feature of any initiative which claims the word "community" in its name.

The AGM is of course also the occasion on which the Co-op committee is elected each year. For those who are unfamiliar with the formal governance arrangements, the Co-op is the legal entity which owns the two farm businesses. Individuals who choose to buy shares in the farms actually become shareholders of the Co-op. It is therefore the task of the Co-op committee to represent the entire community of shareholders (now numbering in excess of 500) and - as representatives of the owners - to work to ensure the sustainability of our farm enterprises in the long term. This work happens mainly in the background, but is a very important aspect of our community farm initiative.

The numbers in a box ...

	Plaw Hatch	Tablehurst
Turnover	£812,000	£862,000
Profit	£48,000	(£8,000)

The Co-op committee is very keen to strengthen the group, so if you feel that you could serve our farms in this capacity, please do get in touch with the committee secretary, Robert Mensinga at robert@mensinga.com. The other members re-confirmed at the AGM are Robin Evans (treasurer), Peter Brinch, Richard Evans, Oliver Fynes-Clinton, Brian Swain and Jenny Wright. Peter Brown and John Twyford are also committee members on an *ex-officio* basis. If you don't want to become a committee member, then do at least consider becoming a shareholder - see below.

Bananas?

The AGM ended with a Q & A session, and one question came up which has prayed on my mind for years. It concerns the range of produce sold in our farm shops. Both shops started their lives as direct retail outlets for the foodstuffs reared and grown on the farms, sometimes in their raw state, and sometimes processed (yoghurt, cheese, pies etc). Over the years, both shops have expanded their offerings, buying in various goods from elsewhere to extend the range of products that they can offer and of course to improve their financial viability. Is this a good thing? If so, what underlying principles should inform the buying policies of our farm shops? Do we aspire to one-stop rural "mini-supermarkets", or does a "farm shop" need to have an essentially different character? How important is it that goods sold are biodynamic? Is organic a satisfactory standard? What about food miles? Should we focus on local food, and if so, then exactly how local? Are apples from New Zealand OK? Tomatoes grown under glass in Spain? Pears from France? Leeks from Yorkshire? Does mode of transport matter? What about fruit and veg that don't grow in the UK such as bananas or grapefruit? Is it good to "top-up" our own crops from elsewhere when they run out? What about bread and cakes, olive oil and wine, herbal teas and oatcakes? I know that both farm management teams are awake to these questions and have grappled with them regularly, and it certainly isn't for me to dictate answers - indeed I would first have to disentangle my own confused thoughts in order to do so! I do however think that this is an important topic and I would really welcome feedback from both farms on how they make their buying decisions and how they see their shops developing in the future.

Chris Marshall

NOW

is the time to become a farm partner. Buy a Co-op share for £100 and become a real participant in our community farm initiative for the long term. Just fill in the form!

Some thoughts on an Unusual Bee Hive, prefaced by something Goethe had to say about Nature *by Mark Haughton*

Regular readers of this newsletter cannot fail to have noticed the word *bees* cropping up, with Peter in the last newsletter introducing us to the Sun Hive project. With his characteristic enthusiasm and energy Peter saw the value of having them at Tablehurst, in a biodynamic context. Working alongside Heidi Hermann of the Natural Bee Keeping Trust, whose own enthusiasm on the subject of bees is nationally known, they are developing the Guenther Mancke Sun Hive design and offering workshops for them to be made by people here in the UK. Rachel Hanney, who has been a wonderful volunteer at Tablehurst for years, is now expanding her portfolio and is leading these workshops.

I came into the story because Peter persuaded me that we could make the woodwork for the hives here on the farm...in my workshop. I was a bit daunted initially, but Peter's excitement was infectious. The construction is unlike anything I have done before, with the making of many jigs and templates to execute numerous repeat operations efficiently. But wood is wood and that's my thing. So I'm currently up to my neck in the project, amidst piles of frames and boards, and unusual shaped pieces of wood stacked high in the workshop. Rachel has been helping with some of the work and we discuss details of construction regularly. I am also being very ably helped by Mariana Rudolph. She is looking for work in a UK Camphill community, having completed her woodwork training in one in Germany...if anyone out there is interested.



for making the straw coil are another batch of bits... So everything arrived, thoroughly wrapped, from the laser company, all edges charred, as we had been informed, but every shape exactly to size and cloned to the exact numbers required. Technology for you; phew! It saved me weeks of work and everyone some money! Well it's how it should be...although there was a lot of cleaning up of charring to do!

So here I am in the workshop focusing on a little hoop, a ninth part of the set that goes to make one hive. On a horizontal sanding machine I am removing the laser charring on the outside edge. This involves drawing the whole arc of the edge over the sander in a sweeping movement, maintaining an even pressure to remove just the right amount all the way round the curve. I have timed this operation and found it takes about 6 seconds. Once the action is established it quickly becomes habituated and rhythmic, and I fall into a sort of trance, noting the hiss of the sanding and the slowing of the motor as it engages, then the clack of the hoops as I pick them up and put them down. My body is fully engaged, my mind free enough to enjoy the rhythm, and thoughts it evokes. Musicians practicing their scales must do something similar though more skilled! But this kind of repetitive work can be seen everywhere in human life, from the bricks laid in a building, to the shirts sown together by a seamstress in a factory in Calcutta. I am struck too by how nature gives a special place for this kind of predictable repetition. The most obvious source of rhythm in ourselves is our own heartbeat and with it perhaps our love of music; incredible to think my heart will beat constantly, at an average of slightly over a beat per second until the day I die ... Every day at work I do things like sweep, make phone calls, think about my work, organize my tools and the space. This is is another kind of personal rhythm which builds over years and a lifetime. The a-rhythmic quality at times, where the patterns are broken, is still a part of the bigger rhythm.

So one could say the whole universe is made up of an infinite accretion of rhythmic events like the sanding of my little hoop. Thinking, associatively, of sand, there are the trillions of grains of it on the planet; nature has brought some together to

Nature! We are surrounded by her, entwined with her and unable to escape from her.

Unmasked and unwarned, she takes us into the circle of her dance and carries us along until we are weary and fall from her arms.

She creates new forms, but the new are always the old.

She builds and destroys.

She lives in countless children but the mother, where is she?

She is the outstanding artist. Each one of her works is a separate creation, yet all are parts of the one.

All men are within her and she is in all.

Life is her fairest invention, death her means to create more life.

We obey her laws even when we resist them.

We work with her even when we would work against her.

She has no speech nor language but she creates tongues and hearts through which she feels and speaks.

She is totality. Everything exists in her always. Goethe

create my favorite beach at Holkham in Norfolk, an uncountable number of waves bringing it all there. Think of the structure and reliability of the molecular double helix which carries the genetic code for every living thing, another miracle of repetition. It gives a flower a precise number of petals, and allows that every member of that species can have that number, but always with a possibility of small variation.

Of course the bees, for whom these hives are intended, manifest amazing forms of rhythm in the way they build their combs; hexagonal repeatable structures, strong, efficient, beautiful. And not only the combs but the bees themselves; it is said that there are anything between 10,000 and 50,000 bees in a healthy hive. Like the components received from the laser company, each bee is almost identical but with a unique individuality, and far more beautiful. Together the bees collect honey and pollen and secrete wax for the combs all summer, going to and from the hive, communicating the whereabouts of new sources food to their fellow bees with the extraordinary "waggle dance".



One kind of appreciation of rhythm involves counting, a peculiarly human activity. Any other phenomenon of rhythm could be said to simply exist, in and of itself. But this counting, which only we humans do to any appreciable extent, seems to me to suggest some extra sense of the underlying mystery in all that is, with numbers in every direction, in my otherwise chaotic musings, quickly multiplying towards infinity, towards the mystery of what is beyond the space time dimensions we inhabit. I suppose I always feel drawn to this bigger picture, the one that frames everything, while perhaps getting a bit lost on my interplanetary travel. But being in the rhythm, of anything, has a way of holding me in the moment, in my body, heart beating, breathing, this inhalation and exhalation which has its own changing rhythm. Stretching the concept of rhythm to breaking point almost, as I no doubt am, enables me to see the conjunction and therefore significance of each infinitely small event in the existence of the whole. All those uncountable grains of sand on my beach, the rhythm of my footsteps on them, the sea, without which no beach, and the bees with their amazing spirit of cooperation in constructing their combs. Well these musings don't get the work done! There never seems to be enough time for it all. But maybe they give it some context and meaning....which might have a value!

Some Impressions of our first hive making workshop *by Rachel Hanney*

After months of planning, our first Sun Hive workshop was held on 22 & 23 September in the beautiful surroundings of the Rachel Carson building at Emerson. And what a success! Each of our course participants went home with completed hives. We couldn't have asked for such a supportive group for our pioneering workshop - Thank you.

The next workshop scheduled for mid October is fully booked and, at time of writing, only 4 places remaining for 10 & 11 November. Regular Sun Hive workshops will be held during 2013 - for more information and dates please visit www.naturalbeekeepingtrust.org.

I like to say a very big thank you to everyone at the Natural Beekeeping Trust and Tablehurst Farm for their support.

And here is a taste of the feedback to the first workshop:

"My impression of the whole workshop was of a wonderful "social deed" as well as an act of love for our bees"
(Michael, Hampshire)

"Thank you for such a great course this weekend! I had a wonderful time"
(Kelsey, Sussex)

"While still on a post Sun hive making high I would like to thank you all for running such a wonderful course. It was beautifully facilitate by Rachel, Heidi and Peter who were so calm and encouraging and looked after us so well. I feel its success was a reflection of the immense preparation work put in by the whole team. Thank you. It was just so exhilarating to come out of a 2 day workshop with such a stunning architectural structure and can now dream about the bees that will make it their home. Thanks again" (Cornelia, Sussex)



Tablehurst Farm

a Biodynamic and organic community farm
London Road, Forest Row, RH18 5DP 01342 823 173

**Celebrate lambing on
Saturdays 23 & 30 March 2013**
café serving refreshments
organic BBQ from 12:30 - 2:00pm
live music



photograph courtesy of Will Heap Photography, taken from Biodynamics in Practice by Tom Petherick, Sophia Books

Tablehurst Farm Shop & Café open Thursday, Friday & Saturday 9:00 - 5:00pm
Café also open Sundays (March to October)
Visitors are responsible for their own safety. Dogs must be kept on leads

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Community Farm
Forest Row, RH18 5DP
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Goose, Duck and Chicken

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With Ashley Ramsden,
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Dorothea Leber is constantly in
need of accommodation for
apprentices, volunteers and
short-term visitors to Michael
Hall garden. Could you provide a
room - short term or long term -
in exchange for a regular veg
box and some help in your own
garden? If so, contact Dorothea:

dorothea.leber@michaelhall.co.uk

The values of Michael Hall Garden, conceived by the people who work there

We value

The garden's infinite life, seen and unseen,

Embracing the whole range from microscopic soil life to the planets and stars and the people
working and visiting

The garden's beauty and its ability to inspire people

The garden's liveliness and aliveness

Which calls us to practise bio-diversity and challenges us to be imaginative, creative, and adaptable,
to engage with the elements and to grow in our perception and understanding

The Bio-dynamic preparations which we use intensively to enhance, and honour
this aliveness

The garden's call for loving commitment

All the work of the people before and after us,
with the garden's 200 year history and bio-dynamics being actively practiced during the
last 30 years

**Being part of Michael Hall School and sharing its inspirational
values**

Its nature and excellence as an open air classroom, informing people of all ages, children,
parents, teachers friends and providing a space for the bio-dynamic apprenticeship

The learning and teaching of true craftsmanship and care

Having our neighboring farms east and west of us,
with active exchanges and support for each other

Working in trust and honesty and being able to operate our garden
shop on a trust system

**Looking after our own and each other's wellbeing, caring for our soil and
using finances**

and natural resources responsibly

Learning from each other and the plants every day

The princess and the Dragon (see back page)

Once upon a time, when the earth was still very young, The God of farms and farmers sent down his sons and daughters to the earth to bring down his blessings and gifts to the people there. To this place and to this place he sent his daughter, Princess Demeter. Oh, she with tussocks of golden hair, as golden as the straw at harvest time and she who smelt of sun-kissed hay. Over her shimmering green frock she wore a magnificent cloak which she lay out over the young earth and it was and it was filled with all colours – reds, yellows, gold, crimson pinks. When the sun shone down on those colours they lifted their heads towards the light and there shimmered the flowers, the fruits, the stems and leaves. The roots stirred underground. Demeter every so often would draw out from the pockets of the cloak a hive of bees, or a dragon of dragon-flies. The chrysalis beads on the cloak burst open to reveal glittering butterflies who danced in the sunshine. The animals that grazed on this land were plump and content. The people couldn't help themselves but come to walk on her cloak. Demeter's radiance shone up beneath their feet. When they gathered together to harvest the fruits from the earth, to pluck the potatoes and the leeks and the carrots they sang in harmony with the bees and the birds.

Now being a princess, Demeter knew a great deal about farming, but she did not know how to drive a tractor and nor was she always able to persuade the animals and people to harvest and graze the land at the right time and in the right place. So she needed help! From the very core of her being she sang her calling song, not unlike the buzzing of the bees. And so these special people came, farmers who farmed using all their senses and who knew to ride their tractors following seams of her cloak. These farmers farmed with great love for Demeter and often when they looked into each other's eyes they would see her radiance shining there. Sometimes they would see love for each other shining there too. This always made Demeter feel especially happy.

Each day Demeter would ride astride one of the gleaming cows, holding on to the cow's moon like horns, horns hooked to the heavens, she would ride around the farm bring her joy wherever she went. Every day she ended up seeing her friend Wurzel. Wurzel was a bit in love with Demeter!

One day he didn't see Demeter, not that day nor the next or the next. And what worried him more was the grass seemed to have stopped growing, the animals stood around with a dull, listless look in their eyes. The people did not seem to be looking at each other; their eye-brows were knitted and knotted together. And the machinery did not seem to be working... when the tractor went a ploughing the sharp plough-share kept bouncing back off the earth. And what was worst, there was a distinct smell of scorched grass which was getting up his nose. He called his wise friend Anthony the white owl. Whoo, ooohoo, Oh Wurzel, it is terrible, Princess Demeter has been taken by a fierce dragon. Whoo, ooooo whooo. I have done what I can and called together my owl friends. We have placed a

ring of protection around the farm as all is not well. But it will be safe as long as we do this. But how Wurzel, Whoo, ooooo whooo are we going to save the Princess.

Now, Wurzel did not need to think longer than a moment. He knew there were only three farmers who were bold and strong enough in their hearts to do this. Stuart, Terry and Andrew. He believed they could do it. Because he was stuck in one place, he called to them to come to him. He asked them to take on this brave and courageous task. The guys agreed to it immediately. Wurzel persuaded them to take the horses, Sarah's horses, as they go quicker on their four legs. Stuart jumped onto Abracadabra, the horse with the armour (could be useful!) Terry leapt on gentle Liberty and Andrew onto bold Aslam. And they were off, galloping into the western horizon where they could see a tiny speck of red in the distant sky. Although they were going at quite some speed, our heroes, the guys, began to wonder how they would ever reach the dragon up there in the distant sky.

But the horses knew! With a twinkle in their eyes they unfurled their strong horse wings, (all horses have wings for these occasions you know!) and with a couple of flaps of their wings the guys gleefully floated up, up towards the dragon speck and with a couple more flaps and before you could say 'The Princess has been taken by the dragon' they were on up his red fiery tail. They could see the princess caught in his talons; heard her desperate cries that she be taken back to her beloved farm. As flames flared out of his nostrils he claimed the princess for his own, and she would bring only him joy now. Just then they had reached the entrance to his lair, his dragon den. But Stuart was quick and lifted the rope of Abracadabra's saddle and lassoed that dragon around his scaly neck. But the dragon was strong and Stuart needed help. So he called on his two team mates Andrew and Terry – quick as a flash they were off their horses, onto Abracadabra, grabbing onto that rope. That large-bellied and mighty-winged Dragon pulled and thrashed. He couldn't get away, but he could drag the riders down, down, down, down into that deep volcano, into his dungeon. Brave Abra danced in the air on his wings keeping up with the dragon's descent. Down, down they went until they reached the bottom of that deep, dark volcano. In pitch black and the steamy heat the dragon managed to get away with the princess. Our heroes were lost and confused and unable to see the way. It seemed like a long time that they were lost. After a while they began to pray, pray that they might be able to see a way. And in that moment a light appeared around Abracadabra and the riders. Gently Liberty and bold Aslam had heard their prayers and sent light, love and courage to their friends as they circled around that crater at the tip of the volcano.

Now, they knew where they were heading for they could see before them a huge doorway ahead, a doorway guarded by tongues of flames, tall flames reaching to the height of the tallest trees in the forest. They all knew that the princess was the other side of that doorway.

They reached into their well of courage, way down inside them and when they were ready, Abracadabra stepped out one hoof at a time for seven steps through the flames. The ball of light around them even cooled the flames as they passed through the door. On the other side it was very bleak. In the light shining from Abracadabra, Andrew could see the dragon curled up near the door which they had come through. He heard the dragon snuffling dragony dreams and then snoring loudly pushing up steam through his nostrils. He knew it was key that they must not wake the dragon. 'QUIET' he said. In silence they jumped off the horse and led him in light bubble around the dark cavern searching for the princess in all the nook, twists and corners. It was Terry who first saw the princess trapped on a bed of straw. He saw she was unharmed other than the trap of a shackle around her ankle. His joy turned to dismay, but then in an 'ah-ha' moment he remembered that he had his bike key with him – and it fitted the lock! The princess was free! Our heroes lifted the princess onto Abracadabra and they began their getaway! But what they did not realise was that the dragon had woken up – the prisoner's chain had been attached to the dragon's tail and Princess Demeter was making an escape.

The dragon's tail thrashed around wildly, fire sprouted from his nostrils. Horse and riders dashed through the flamed door out onto the volcano. The dragon sped out in hot pursuit, he was confident of victory on his patch! BUT when he set foot and claw outside his door he felt underfoot MUD, sticky, slimy mud. Dragons HATE mud! Liberty and Aslam knew this, they were the ones who sent down a deluge, a deluge of mud to turn the hot rock into wet sludge! Abra was right at home trotting through the mud, it was like it at Tablehurst farm! As the Dragon slid, skidded and skated out of control, his leg got caught in his wing, he trod on his tail, fell on his side and rolled on his back and there he lay, feet up, stuck, stuck, STUCK in the mud!

Meanwhile Abra trotted gracefully and then unfurled his wings to carry his precious cargo up to the summit where the other two horses waited. They met as the sun rose on the other horizon. A gentle breeze carried them all, as if on a cloud and the sunbeams shone the way home. It was Anthony and his owls who spied them first and they sent a wave of joyful hoots around their ring! Once on land Stuart, Terry and Andrew arrived for a heroes' hearty breakfast. The horses went back to their stables to a manger of steaming oats. Demeter tenderly laid out her cloak. The next day Wurzel noticed the grass began to grow again, the animals munched it and the farmers looked at each other again, smiling. He heard the tractor start up and he watched as the plough share turned the ground again, the earth as soft as butter! Wurzel was glad right through to his hat to his straw belly to his wellington boots. He looked forward to Demeter's evening visit. He was right happy to be at Tablehurst farm!

Created by Sarah Vaughan and Anne Searancke for Tablehurst Farm, September 2012

A gift weekend

As part of research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, our farms recently hosted visiting gardeners from Manchester and London, who brought with them scarecrows bearing gifts. As Professor Andrew Church, the principal researcher from the University of Brighton explained, community food growing is a creative act that involves both individuals and groups. At the heart of this act is a series of exchanges, involving people and place. The notion of gift exchange - as exemplified by the scarecrows - is valuable for understanding communal acts of creativity associated with food growing - through which we can understand more about community identities and connections. The event involved a gift ceremony, a scarecrow-making workshop and two stories about the farms, told by Sarah Vaughan and Anne Searancke. One of these stories is reproduced overleaf. It tells us about the importance of gift exchange, and weaves into the story our own scarecrow 'PC Worzel Gumstrip' and his heroic friends, Stuart, Terry and Andrew, our residents at Tablehurst. Following the weekend activities, PC Worzel Gumstrip and his friend Joyce, from Manchester, have settled near the Tablehurst drive, where they welcome visitors to the farm.

Neil Ravenscroft

Photos courtesy of David Fernandes



Help us house another farmer at Plaw Hatch



This is the view of the Plaw Hatch "home field" from Christine Herbert's house. It is one of the most popular fields with the cows who feel close to us and have only a small walk to the parlour in the morning. For the same reason it is one of the most popular fields with the milkers.

Christine, who many of you know as a curative eurhythmist, has lived in this house next to Plaw Hatch for over 20 years. She is now in the process of moving back to Holland. It has been an inspiring experience to witness Christine, with a crippling hip condition, packing her car one box at a time and driving her goods across the channel, one load at a time. This is a real example of someone who *can* eat an elephant one bite at a time. Richard Evans is helping her with her final loads; another lesson for us all.

The house is a mobile home that has been developed into a lovely real home - ideal accommodation for one of the farm staff. It would be a real shame to see this property in the hands of anyone other than Plaw Hatch (and the land itself is already owned by St Anthony's Trust).

Christine would like £45,000 for this house, which is a number not too different from a recent professional valuation. It is a small amount of money in the grand scheme, but a large sum for the farm which is facing considerable expenditure in the near future. If anyone feels able to contribute to the purchase of this property, please could you contact me, John Twyford, by email at jgtwyford@gmail.com, or by phone: 0788 972 0399.

