

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

SUMMER 2013

## A fond farewell to Barry and Rosemary

It seems an age ago since the original farm team at Tablehurst managed to entice Barry to come to the farm and forsake a regular job. I remember the endless trips to Fry's in East Grinstead I used to make to move meat around and building up the trade to justify our own in-house butcher: and what a butcher! You couldn't find a nicer chap; he really threw himself into it, engaged with the farm community, loved the meals, was open to trying out new recipes for sausages & burgers and wasted nothing. He was also a good teacher, he had to work with an endless procession of students who knew nothing about meat, he was always patient and good humoured, and I know I learned a lot.



A young Barry with Bernie in the early days

I really enjoyed

working with him - we got on very well, I can't remember how long it was before Rosie joined us, a couple of years maybe... it would be on record somewhere. At first she came in to help a little - just for the company I think - and gradually got more and more involved, which is of course what happens! It was nice for Barry and great for the farm, between them they have made a fantastic contribution to the success of Tablehurst, as the shop is the first point of contact to the farm for many people so it is a crucial to have the friendly welcome they provided.

It was a gamble for all of us, for the farm to bring in someone from outside and to pay a proper wage, but especially for Barry. He had worked for Fry's since he was a lad, so it was a big move and the conditions weren't great: small old fridge room; small everything! I remember originally he had the idea to help on the farm some of the time and not be confined to the shop. It was his dream, but it never really happened as things took off too quickly.

Bernie Carnegie

### Who is Bernie?

For those who don't know her, Bernie was one of the original farm and shop team when Tablehurst began life as a community farm nearly 20 years ago.



The original Tablehurst Farm shop

# Tablehurst Farm Report

A lot has happened since the spring newsletter came out. Peter, currently on sabbatical, has left huge gaps on the farm and Amelia, who has been taking care of the shop, has left us at the end of April for the time being. Tomi, former apprentice, and Daan, from Holland, have joined us for the season to complete the team again.

We said good bye to Sergio and Tonno, our last apprentices and welcomed Caroline, Luigi and Emil as new apprentices into the team. We will also lose Barry and Rosie this June, who have been the heart of our shop and butchery for so many years, and employed Clare and Verity (comes in August) to complete the shop team once more. Barry and Rosie will retire to Cornwall and we thank them with all our heart and wish them a wonderful time in their new house and environment.

As always, so many staff changes can make things difficult and we take it as a positive challenge to not only maintain the status quo but also to develop the farm further.

After a cold, wet and long winter the weather is much kinder now and the crops as well as finally the grass are growing well.

The whole season is delayed by a few weeks and we only just managed to bring the last few sows out on the field. All pig houses had to be refurbished but they almost look like new now and the pigs are enjoying the gentle mixed weather. Thanks to Tomi our pig breeding has improved a lot and we are rearing many more pigs now since we overcame fertility problems which had built up over the last years. We now have a new Duroc boar and kept many of our own replacement gilts. After we had to buy in organic pigs from Laverstock Farm and Helen Browning to supply our customers, we believe that we can again provide you solely with our own pigs from September on.

The cows are doing well outside and we are also rearing biodynamic young stock from Tregillis Farm in Cornwall at the moment since we cannot hold enough stock ourselves.

After the gas explosion (due to a faulty heater), the chicken have recovered from the shock and await a brand new poultry house thanks to our expensive but excellent insurance. The turkeys and geese have arrived a few weeks ago and look very good. This year we only grow organic turkey chicks and avoid the modern bigger breeds completely. We had to drive to Cornwall to pick them up but we believe it is worth growing traditional breeds and that our customers will appreciate that.

The Wiltshire Horn sheep we bought in last autumn are doing particularly well. They are self-shedding and look a bit rough at times but they are healthy and strong, are excellent mothers and their lambs are growing fast and strong. Personally I enjoy the horned ewes and rams and they just seem to be the right choice for a biodynamic farm. After the Sussex cows and the Oxford Sandy and Black pigs they are the third old traditional breed we have. The first two breeds can be traced back 300 years, a slightly smaller version of the Wiltshire Horns was around before the Romans came to England!

While we try to consolidate our farm enterprises who had changing managers over the last years, the garden is doing well with Rob in the fourth and Stephen in the second year. Although everything is late due to the cold spring, the crops are looking beautiful and our vegetable sales have doubled compared to last year.

Bigger changes will happen on the retail side of the farm. After we had built the new farm shop in 2008, the sales did not increase much while our expenses went up quite drastically. We realize that just relying on meat, no matter how good it is, is not enough to remain a stable and viable business in the future and we are planning, after we started growing vegetables 3 years ago, to change our shop interior. The conversion is planned for middle of July and will see the vegetable display integrated into the shop as well as new products and a better bread display. At the same time we will gain more protected seating space outside the shop on the terrace which will get a roof this month. We will also open the shop 5 days a week by the end of July (tbc)!!

The café, run by Holly now, is finally doing well and we will extend the menu over the next weeks to meet our customer's wishes better.

Last but not least we have started with the Children Allotment Project next to the propagation tunnel at the entrance of the farm. Selma from Brambletye Corner is the organiser while Peter Brinch, who also maintains a small biodynamic seed breeding plot next to it, teaches parents and children how to grow biodynamic vegetables!

This is a project which is really at the heart of what we are doing and it is wonderful to see it happening. A bigger project (had been previously planned for this year), will happen in the near future.

David Junghans



## Farm Admin Assistant

Do you have good all-round office skills  
inc. using spreadsheets and marketing?

Are you good with people and prepared 'to muck in'?

Do you have the confidence to take initiatives  
and the humility to learn from others as you grow?  
Would you like to be part of a thriving farm team  
that truly cares about sustainable food production,  
animal husbandry and land management?

Plaw Hatch Farm is an established dairy farm and shop.

We have an exciting opportunity for someone who  
shares our values to join our team as a part-time  
(2-3 days/week) administrative assistant.

Minimum wage, but maximum job satisfaction!

**For further details please contact John Twyford:**

**01342 810652 or 07889720399**

**email: [info@plawhatchfarm.co.uk](mailto:info@plawhatchfarm.co.uk)**

# Sowing and harvesting in the vegetable garden

This time I'd like to write something about picking vegetables, because I've been observing again and again, how the way one picks vegetables will influence how they grow, i.e. if you pick well you will get a healthier crop and a lot more out of it. Some of this I've been taught, and some of it I just observed over the years. I'm talking especially about the leafy vegetables.

There are vegetables you cut below their growing point, like lettuce, cornsalad, cabbages.

That's easy, you cut them once, and then you plant something else (if you cut lettuce above its heart, you get a cut and come again, which you can keep cutting until it goes to seed. You can do the same with corn salad and annual spinach, mizuna, rocket and winter purslane are also real cut and come again crops). But there also are a whole lot of vegetables where you keep picking, like leaf beet, kale, herbs, etc. There the picking is not dissimilar to pruning. You take something off, but in such a way that the rest of the plant is stimulated to grow more.

Let's take Spinach and parsley; they have a rosette of leaves. With vegetables like this I find it best to take a few of the biggest leaves from each plant and I pick them from the base. The reasons for this are, it's always best to separate leaf and plant where there is a natural place. The leaves will keep better, because they lose less moisture and the plant doesn't need to deal with half stalks, that will rot after a while. (It's similar to beetroots and black radishes, where it's better to twist the leaves off the roots, rather than cutting, which would cause bleeding)

I find the best way for spinach, parsley and kale is to put my finger into the axle of the leaf, and press down and twist. This way there is no danger of uprooting the plant and the leaf comes off very easily. One can also pick more than one leaf at once like that. When I pick I also remove any yellow or sickly looking leaves. I always take care to keep a balance between picking and leaving enough leaves for the plant to keep growing, after all the plant creates its energy through the leaves. (even though plants with big roots have a huge energy store there as well).

Then there are things like for example Basil. The longer you prevent it from flowering, the longer it will grow leaves. The more you pick, the more you get. That also applies for majoram, oreganum and lemon balm.

Basil I start picking when it's fairly young. I take the top out, and leave 2 or 3 axels, out of which new shoots will grow. Like that you get a bushier plant. Then I keep picking the tops, to always prevent it from flowering. Sometimes when it has flowered you can give it a good "hair cut" with secateurs and it will grow out again.

Especially fussy I am with the flowers: Again the more you pick the more you get, but always make sure you look: how does it grow, where are the new buds coming from. I will cut them just above an axle where the plant can then divide and grow more, (rather than below, leaving a long stalk, that can only die off).

Dorothea Leber

## Now what do I sow June to October?

### June

Endives, sugarloaves, radicchio, lettuces (choose varieties that are good for summer, and be aware that in temperatures over 20°C, lettuce doesn't germinate very well) dill, coriander in fortnightly intervals, carrots, beetroots. Late beans until mid June (for those of you who want to eat them after the holidays)

Squash is still possible in the beginning of June, sweetcorn, purple sprouting broccoli, red kale, black kale, (that's thinking about the next year, purple sprouting will be ready in March...and needs protection from Pigeons, etc.), mooli, sunflowers for after the holidays, Florence fennel till mid June, biannuals (e.g. Sweet Williams, Wallflowers, Clary Sage, Canterbury Bells)

Perennials (e.g. Echinacea, Yarrow, Valerian, Lychnis, etc.)

### July

Lettuce till mid July, spring greens. From mid July: cornsalad, winter purslane (you need to germinate it in a cool place. I use my tool shed or some shady place (in Germany we used to put it into our large walk-in fridge to germinate!!!)), winter spinach.

Beginning of July: Black Spanish winter radish, you can still sow your last carrots and beetroots.

### August

The first 2 weeks of August is a time which is probably the most possible for a little holiday.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half the winter lettuces will need sowing, rocket, mizuna, pak-choi, etc for autumn and winter, purslane, spinach, corn salad, overwintering spring onions, land cress

### September

Similar to August, until mid September you can sow outdoor corn salad and winter spinach. I keep going with successions of salad leaves overwintering peas and sweet-peas

### October

Broad beans, garlic

Corn salad to be picked in the new year.

Greenhouse carrots for spring

## TABLEHURST BARN DANCE AND BARBECUE

Saturdays 29 June and 29 September at 8pm

£5 entrance, 14 years +

# Sun hive workshops at Tablehurst ...



Following the launch of the Sun Hive at the Natural Beekeeping Alliance Conference last August, Tablehurst Farm and the Natural Beekeeping Trust have been running workshops teaching beekeepers to make their own Sun Hives. Since September six courses have been held and we are delighted to report 60 Sun Hives have been completed by workshop participants from far and wide - North America, Hungary, France, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and closer to home - Forest Row, Ashurstwood and East Grinstead.

One hive is destined for a conservation project in Peru and another to a Tipi Community in the US. We also had the great pleasure of sending a hive to India - the Araku Valley in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The Naandi Foundation - whose mission is to eradicate poverty worldwide - is working with the Adivasi (tribal) people on a very large project to create sustainable, biodynamically-based livelihoods in this severely deforested region. The hive was sent as a prototype for local people to replicate.



Last August a small band of volunteers and Tablehurst Farm hand-harvested rye straw for the Sun Hive project. We didn't harvest enough and in February we were lucky enough to purchase organic wheat straw from a small farm in Dorset.



Rachel Hanney

I am desperately seeking volunteers for this year's harvest. I can't as yet give a date, but it will be sometime in August. Please contact [rachel.hanney@btinternet.com](mailto:rachel.hanney@btinternet.com) if you would like to register your interest in volunteering for this amazing project.

## ... and a sun hive (with bees!) at Michael Hall

We have bees in our Sunhive now!!! Iona Woods brought us a swarm, and together with Peter Brown we gave the bees their new home. They happily moved in and the day after as I'm writing have been busy visiting the flowers in the garden. The swarm is from Iona's very first bees at Trefoil farm school that were her own teacher's while she was learning about bees, and now she uses this hive to teach the children there, it's an especially friendly and strong hive. It seems so fitting that now one of this hive's swarms should come here to teach me and my garden team and the children at Michael Hall about the bee's wonderful nature. Thank you Iona!

Dorothea Leber



# Plaw Hatch Shop News

For me this is the best time of year in the shop as now is the beginning of the prolific summer crops - cucumbers, beetroot, mange tout, carrots, courgettes are here with tomatoes, peppers, aubergines and beans not far behind - plus much more. Walking through the polytunnels is a real sense experience for the eyes and nose. Of course not forgetting our best seller by far (and this is where there should be a drum roll!) for.....the salad bags! Much time, love and care is taken by the garden team, headed by Liz and Nir, picking and preparing these each day. Over the last few years the numbers of salad bags sold has increased hugely. In the first five months of last year we sold in excess of two thousand salad bags and this year, in the same period that figure had risen to well over three thousand!



We produce as much as we can from the garden and each year what we grow and how much is reviewed, with the garden team responding as much as they and the land can do to what is most in demand from customers. Over the last few years the shop has become so busy that it is not possible to provide everything from our own garden but luckily we are blessed with having some excellent local suppliers that we purchase from when we can't supply enough from our own garden. One of our priorities is to sell as much local produce as possible, of course always organic and preferably biodynamic. These are mainly Tablehurst, Cherry Gardens, Brambletye Fruit Farm and Michael Hall, followed by Laines Farm in Cuckfield, Perry Court Farm (biodynamic, Canterbury), Fletching Glasshouses and Hankham Organics nr Eastbourne. Then we have our two main wholesalers, Seasons and Langridge Organics where we buy the rest of our produce.

When we are buying from the wholesalers it is at that point that we have to decide what is reasonable and necessary to our business yet taking into account the global impact of produce supplied from further afield. With many of our customers going out of their way to come to us, if our shop had a limited stock, particularly at certain times of the year we know that they would very likely shop elsewhere. Customers have very differing priorities: some want only Demeter produce, some only local, some just good availability of the 'basics', some a 'one stop shop' so we try to meet as many of these needs as possible without compromising ourselves.



There are some crops that we really only stock as just seasonal and local - I think it is all too true that many things taste better for waiting for them and eating them only at certain times of the year and for me these are things like asparagus, broad beans, peas, beans, sweetcorn, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries etc and when they have gone that's it for another year. Absence really does make the heart grow fonder!

There are so many differing views to take into account - for example take apples, considered to be a basic, in season here in the autumn

but once you get to the spring the choice is usually either new season apples from much further afield or UK apples which have been stored in chillers since harvesting. Which is better? Both are using energy of one sort or another. What I try to do is to give you the choice. What is considered a basic for one customer is not for another - one of our biggest sellers is bananas.



# Plaw Hatch Shop News (continued)

It is a constant juggling act working with so many suppliers, particularly as it might just be one thing we are buying from them but I love that side of it, the contact with the grower, for me it is the icing on the cake. I really look forward to that call at a particular time of year, it's a real marker in the year, 'Blueberries are ready', or it might be 'Wild mushrooms - do you want any?' - wild garlic...that's another one.. I love it!

There is no doubt that it is this and the ability to be so closely connected with where the food is produced that also excites customers. Whether it be for freshness, vitality, integrity, health, food miles, food scares...the list is endless, all these are why we are seeing such increasing volumes of customers here on the farm. We keep thinking it must at some point slow down, and at some point it must, if only because we are almost at our production capacity here on the farm, yet it hasn't happened yet.

With each new food scare more and more people are evaluating their eating habits - where does it come from?, how is it grown/reared? The interest in the raw milk, kefir and yoghurts (in fact all the dairy produce) just keeps growing. Every week there are new customers who have either been told about the milk or who have been doing their own research and have decided that this is what they want. The dairy is now working flat out to meet the unprecedented demand for all the products and if at times your favourite yoghurt isn't in the shop please bear with us - it's at these times you find a new favourite!



Over the last three years the shop sales have increased by 20%, 21% and 17% year on year, and at the moment that trend is continuing. This is all good news for the much needed investment in new farm equipment and general infrastructure but like all things with gain comes strain! You may begin to notice a few more grey hairs on us all!

Jenny Wright

## A perspective on everything

After nearly 20 years here in Forest Row, with many of those years lived in a connection with Tablehurst Farm, I am moving to Norfolk. The period has seen the farm develop from a small, visionary adventure into a maturing enterprise. I feel a need to draw together and let go the past as well as excitement at what is to come. It seems a good moment to collect some thoughts.

Writing for this newsletter has been a privilege for me. It has allowed me to explore issues and share enthusiasms, and has been an important part of my involvement with one of the most pioneering and exciting community farms to be found anywhere. I have been slightly surprised, and pleased, that things I have written seem to have been appreciated, so am encouraged to offer more. While my writing often has a reflective personal quality I am aware that I am speaking to many in the context of the newsletter and so I attempt to hook my thoughts to something of a more general interest and relevance. At the same time what I find myself writing always seems to spring from a strong impulse to communicate *my* self to *an* other. It is often in the form of a letter. But I am aware in the context of the newsletter that personal experience truthfully expressed can be a stimulus for change. Change is something I have always felt we - the Co-op, the farm community and the wider anthroposophical movement in all its shades of expression - are about. Not just change for change's sake, but the endlessly complex question of what kind of change? Well, the *right* kind, of course! Hmmm. How does one find the *right* change in this chaotic, unpeaceful, and unjust world. It is also a world existing ultimately within a totality of being I know to be loving. The question of "what change?" is always one without a final answer. But we each share a place in the journey.

At the heart of the conjunction of me plus this extraordinary farm is the great Rudolph Steiner. Like many who come to it, I was not born to or brought up in anthroposophy, let alone biodynamics of which I had only a faint knowledge. I met it all more fully here in Forest Row, and found in it a resonance with the organic movement I knew well but also sensed it answered a certain hunger for something more intangible. As I don't have the brain for great amounts of reading I have since then absorbed Steiner's thinking, rather unreliably probably, in what I would describe as an osmotic way. It has entered my consciousness through dipping into the writings of Steiner and of his exponents, and also through many conversations with friends, and observing and living in the activities of the movement.

I was struck from the first by the powerful holism in the culture, a movement that seemed, like some great religion, to offer a perspective on just about everything! In that sense anthroposophy is like a religion. You could say it offers us a journey to the heart of *all that is*, which could qualify it for that status. But it does not itself profess to be a religion, but rather sets out to help us meet the deepest questions of what it means to be human and to offer a picture of where we are going - and those *right* changes we seek.

It has been my observation that most people are engaged in some kind of existential questioning at times. Questions like, why am I here, and where am I going? As anthroposophy at its core is about such things, the material of anthroposophy can speak to everyone. I suppose it's often a question of where we are in our lives whether we engage with it or not. As with all matters of this kind, the business of what is gloomily called survival often competes for our energy and creates an imbalance, so that

however much we sense the need, we feel we just don't have time or space to do the inner work. Life can be a struggle just to make ends meet, and responding to the bigger picture can seem an indulgence.

Steiner made the time and generously spoke and wrote volumes about what he had come to understand. There are two important elements of his thinking which speak to me and which I will mention here. One is the unusual view he has of human evolution. He does not see it in a Darwinian sense, evolution by a chance driven process of natural selection. He suggests evolution is a process in which we *actively* engage. Because we have a particular quality of *human* consciousness, we are *freed* from the mechanistic model of evolution. We can shape our destinies, both individually and together for good or ill. The bringing *together* of these two concepts, of evolution and of personal, by implication, moral choice, creates a powerful image for me of my place, our place, in human destiny. It is valuable to know that there is a direction and purpose to our being, however small we are individually in the great scheme of things.

The other thing I wanted to mention is about spirituality. What does this somewhat overused word even mean? I find Steiner very helpful here in his pointing out that the very fact that we have thoughts is testament to our spiritual nature. Thoughts are not *of* the body even if they are an accompaniment to having one. Learning how to manage our thought life is the road towards deepening spiritual consciousness he suggests. As I have understood it he is saying that the generation of mental or verbal constructs, as a fact of being human, testifies to there being something intrinsically spiritual about us, before we even know it as such. And from this simple fact it is revealed, like a Damascene blinding flash, that it is possible to conceive knowledge of higher worlds and presumably ultimately God. It is a giant leap and it misses out a lifetime of study, argument and meditation, Steiner's, yours and mine. But it is nevertheless to me a wonderful bridge. The simplicity of knowing that because you are reading this and absorbing meanings from these words, we can both know that we are spiritual in our nature, is to me deeply refreshing and up lifting.

How does all this have real bearing in the context of your life or mine; there is that business of getting a living in a hard and worrying world? What has really drawn me to the farms and into the ethos which informs them is this sense that they aspire to meet the whole person. Because we have diverse parts anthroposophical thinking addresses the person on different levels. Biodynamics says that food is not just the result of a mechanical process, it has forces or energies within it which are subtle and vitalising, and that we derive our full health from our interaction with these energies. So the farms' focus is not just on the production of food but on people.

Conventional agricultural production focuses primarily on the market place; this is its reason for existing and for maximising profit from whatever it can produce from the land. People feature in this system and are of course the beneficiaries as end users, but there is no love of people implicit in it or idea that they matter as individuals. Of course many people at their work believe in what they are doing and do contribute to a better world, but they do so in spite of forces which are pushing the other way.

In contrast, our two farms are community based not for profit organisations, employing many more people in their activities than most farms, offering a home and work for people with special needs, education for young farmers, transparency and involvement for the wider community in diverse ways. All this gets a whole load nearer to addressing that whole person criterion, and putting her or him at the centre of the endeavour. This is truly holistic food production. Added to this is the philosophy of biodynamics, the farm seen as an organism acting as whole entity, having its parts, its community of plants, animals, and people, and everything it does informed by the sense that nature and human life are more than just physical substances and chemical reactions. We are all increasingly aware and concerned about our relationship to nature. It's just that the world as it mainly is is caught up in a vortex where profit and production are at the centre, not people or nature. And this situation derives from an idea of the world, (an idea being in Steiner's terms don't forget, an expression of our non physical spiritual nature!), the idea being that the world is explained in solely physical and scientific terms. But it is this idea, which limits and distorts the picture we have of ourselves, which is causing the problems the world is weighed down by, environmental destruction and all the social chaos which ensues from it. Thank goodness there are other ideas too.

While anthroposophists are just people, the ideas which inform them penetrate a very long way into life's truths and into the nature of being. The message at its deepest is salvational. No one could say that conventional agriculture has such pretensions! Many in fact might say it is not the business of agriculture to be concerned with such things. There are more than enough issues on the ground to be dealing with here and now to be worrying about evolution into a far off future. Well I feel we need to be concerned with both. To know that I have some part in the whole, that this whole is vastly bigger than I can conceive, is to know myself as a responsible adult human being here and now in the present.

I recently went to see the Reverend Nicholas Weinberg to do some work for him. Nicholas is the priest at the Christian Community church, a branch of the Lutheran church founded by people who were interested in the teaching of Rudolph Steiner. I mentioned to him I was offering this piece for the newsletter and asked him about how he understood Steiner's idea of evolution. He was as usual helpful. As you might expect of a priest he pointed me to a passage in the bible, Romans chapter 8 verses 18 to 25. I quote from them: *we know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved.*

I feel I may overstep the mark in drawing on such material for this newsletter. But, consciously at times and less so at others, it has been the material which has been the touchstone for my involvement with the farms. The business of making the farms pay their way is as challenging for them as for any other business, and learning how to live with and love each other is no less of a problem here than anywhere else, however wonderful the sense of community and family may be at times. It does not feel irrelevant to remark here in passing though, that the farms are really fabulous places for children to grow up. I will really miss this place and all the friends I've made here. I have done a bit of my own growing up here, and will certainly be interested in and in touch with how it all unfolds.

Mark Haughton

# Biodynamic Preparations Week at Tablehurst

Presentation on the Biodynamic Preparations by Briony      Tuesday 1st October at 7.30 pm

Making the Biodynamic 'Horn Manure' Preparation      Wednesday 2nd October at 2 pm

Making the Biodynamic 'Compost Preparations' and CPP      Thursday 3rd October at 2pm

Please note that all events start in the Sheep Barn behind the shop. If you would like to join us for the 2 practical prep-making afternoons, please inform Briony (07971 781 325 or [biodynamicbonny@gmail.com](mailto:biodynamicbonny@gmail.com)) in advance.

## Moving on

You will recall that we introduced Merijn Van Den Houdt to you last year as part of an "interim plan" to manage the Plaw Hatch dairy herd after Tom Ventham left the farm last year. It was a baptism of fire for Merijn who had just left Warmonderhof Agricultural College in Holland. He came to Plaw Hatch as a summer volunteer. Now he will be leaving Plaw Hatch in July this year to develop his career in agriculture, but with an enormous amount of experience behind him. Tom Ventham had developed the herd over 10 years into a community treasure, and Merijn had to take over from him with a few weeks of handover. I recall Tom's words just before he left when he was asked how he felt about Merijn's ability to take over the herd: "He loves cows!" And that is what we observed over the last year, the work of a young man who loves cows. One of the tests in this respect, for any new person who wants to get involved with the cows at Plaw Hatch, is bringing them up the track for milking. Our policy is to allow the cows to come up the track at their own pace. It has taken me quite a long time to really feel good about that, because one needs to get on! But Merijn accepted this process from the start. It is just in him.

Unfortunately in organic and biodynamic dairies, it often happens that one person ends up being the milker almost every day. This is because without the routine use of conventional medicines constant and close contact with every cow is essential for early detection and treatment of problems, not to mention that cows like the regularity of gesture and everything else that they associate with a person. It makes milking a relentless and demanding task without much scope for "a life" outside of milking. One of the first things Merijn said to me when he



joined us was that he was uncertain about whether the farmer's life was for him. The farmer's life is that of a husband (animal husband or land husband): continuous caring. It can be exhausting. Merijn has decided that at his age of 23, he needs more flexibility and social opportunity than farming at Plaw Hatch offers.

So Plaw Hatch will once again be recruiting a herdsman for the cows. We are, however, very sad about Merijn's decision to leave. He appeared out of nowhere at exactly the right time and has done exactly what was required of him and more. Thank you Merijn, very well done, and all the best for your future!

It leaves us, and the Community that Supports our Agriculture, with a question: do we need to make the life and work of our farmers more sustainable? For example our old parlour is lovely but strains our backs - regardless of our age by the way. For single people, of which there are a growing number, to be up at 05.00, to be finished at 20.00 (unless an animal in labour needs your help) and to then prepare a healthy meal to eat on your own, is quite a challenge and leaves very little time for a social life, so being single continues. How do we build infrastructure, processes and systems that are sustainable for people and the land in the long term and simultaneously secure the best possible lives for farm animals? That is one of the big questions of our time.

John Twyford



### Dairy Herd Guardian

Do you have a deep respect for cows, raw milk and biodynamic agriculture?

Do you have enough experience of milking to appreciate the time commitment involved?

Are you willing to work in a team, take direction from the farm managers and satisfy the requirements of the dairy processing manager?

Do you understand the realities of dairy farming?

Are you physically and emotionally strong?

Plaw Hatch Farm has 40 MRI cows and produces 130,000 litres of milk annually. We have an exciting opportunity for someone who shares our values to join our team as herds person, with the ultimate aim of becoming fully responsible for our cows. Organic/Biodynamic farming experience, practical farm skills, agricultural training & familiarity with community living desirable but not essential.

If dairy farming is in your blood, we'd love to hear from you. We are able to work with varying levels of experience.

For further details please contact John Twyford:

01342 810652 or 07889720399

email: [info@plawhatchfarm.co.uk](mailto:info@plawhatchfarm.co.uk)