

## Welcome

Recently both Gill and I have lost horses in similar circumstances. The other similarity was that we were both able to rely on friends and neighbours to help at a very traumatic time. In my case a couple of phone calls resulted in a Loadall, a JCB digger, slings, spades and most importantly five people and a Vet willing to wade in thick mud to pull and push a  $\frac{3}{4}$  tonne wet and muddy distressed horse out of a ditch, all arriving within a few minutes of my call. Later big silage bales were brought to stop her falling back into the ditch again and another neighbour brought straw bales to help mop up the mud around her. Despite staying with her most of the night she was too deeply shocked and regretfully had to be put to sleep the next morning. All the effort was provided as an act of friendship without expectation of payment, however they did all get a free mud bath.

In this age of the Internet, email, SMS, Facebook, virtual reality, virtual affairs etc it is easy to forget that there are times when we all need someone to be there. That was one of the reasons for the formation of Cheshire Smallholders, to provide mutual support to each other. To help with this support we are going to circulate members' basic details to each other, see Jane's article later. Please do not opt out of the list and instead pick up the phone and make contact with your small holding neighbours. You never know when you will need help and what it may look like.

Have a happy Christmas  
Kevin

## Lectures and Visits

**January 26th** - Ask the VET. John Yarwood again provides answers to your questions along with his sometimes controversial views.

**February 23-** Farm Shops - The reality of setting up a successful farm shop. NFU Farm Retailer of the year 2006, Best Sausage in the North West 2006 - Andrew Shuffelbottom of Cheerbrooks talks on his experiences.

**March 30 - Ferrets** - Kim Lathaen gives one of her excellent and entertaining talks on ferrets. She will bring some of the wonderful little creatures with her along with terriers. Not one for rabbit lovers.

**April 27 - Regulations** - Janet Todhunter (DEFRA) goes through the latest legislation that you need to be aware of. Janet is also a member of the Rare Breeds Society and is very aware of the way legislation affects us.

Doors open 7.30 for 8pm start. Entry £2. Notice board for ads, sales table, Tea and coffee available. Room L3/L4 The Leverhulme Centre, Reaseheath College, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DF. Come early and have a chat.

## Lecture Reports

The small print - The following are third party reports on what was said and may not accurately represent the views of the speaker and/or what was actually said or advised. Using any of the information in these notes is at your own risk.

**September - Chickens** - Jonathan Spibey, who has been caring for chickens for over 40 years, has lectured on poultry at Reaseheath and ran a commercial breeding operation until avian influenza decimated the market, gave us a very informative lecture. The main points were:

Housing - 1 - 2 sq feet per animal, keep it simple with no/few crevices for bugs, plywood is very good. Make sure cleaning access is easy. Allow 8" of perch per standard size bird. Allow 1 nest box for each 2-3 birds. Perches should be on the same level. You may need planning if over 6 feet high.

Fencing - If 8' high no need to clip wings. Put 12" underground turned about 12" - 18" into pen to stop foxes burrowing in. Electric fencing about 8" and across access doorway.

Bedding - Shavings are best, straw can hold mites and cause compaction if eaten. Clean once per week.

Red Mite - Use Duramitex, on the house not the birds, *(Editor's Note, this has now been banned by the EU as a dangerous chemical, it is still available from certain fancy bird equipment suppliers who have bought up stock as it is very effective, so be careful)* most of the other stuff does not work on red mites so beware. The new artificial creosotes do not kill mites.

Incubating - Keep eggs for 14 days max at cool room temp (not cold). Broody hen is far easier than incubator. Chick can live for 36-48 hrs without food/water as yolk provides food.

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## October- The Sustainability of Rare Breeds-

Peter Titley (Chairman of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust)

Fresh from his starring TV role on Countryfile Peter kindly gave us an informative, interesting and entertaining talk about the challenges facing rare breeds both historically and in the future.

Summarising a wide ranging talk is difficult but the main conclusion was that there is a good future for traditional breeds due to the move toward quality food with minimum of third party input (e.g. grass fed) so that feed like corn can go for human consumption. But there continues to be risks to many breeds due to the numbers of people leaving smallholding.

Peter also commented that Jasper Carrot has complained about the number of people who come up to him (Jasper) in the street enquiring as to whether he is Peter Titley. You need to have been there.

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**October AGM** - There were no volunteers for the committee or any of the officer positions. The treasurer reported a small loss over the year. There were 65 memberships in 2007/8. The Chairman has finished the maximum of two years allowed under the constitution and there is no replacement. It was agreed to phone all the members to try and get additional committee members as the existing committee cannot continue to run the association in its current form beyond this year,s programme.

## November - BASC Shooting and Conversation. Ian Danby

Ian gave an excellent presentation on what appears at first sight to be a contradictory title on the considerable efforts made by the shooting fraternity in the areas of conservation. See [www.shootingfacts.co.uk](http://www.shootingfacts.co.uk) for more information on the facts given by Ian.

In a wide ranging presentation Ian also covered:

- the history of BASC;
- legal aspects of vermin control, which in relation to birds is a very complicated area due to the requirements of EU legislation;
- the benefits of BASC membership; and
- the efforts of Wildlife Habitat Trust in Cheshire.

Also see [www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk) - BASC website and  
[www.wht.org.uk](http://www.wht.org.uk) Wildlife Habitat Trust website.

Jill- As agreed I have not mentioned Badgers. (Again you would have to have been there)

## Membership Update

Over the past few weeks your committee has been telephoning as many members as possible to talk to them about why and what makes them want to be part of Cheshire Smallholders; what are the good things and what could we improve upon?

The issue most regularly requested is for you to have contact with other members and to understand their interests as well as to share experiences. So we have decided to distribute the full membership list of Cheshire Smallholders to enable you to make direct contact with each other. If you do not wish to have your details sent out in this way, please contact Jane Hulse ([Jane.hulse@i7services.co.uk](mailto:Jane.hulse@i7services.co.uk) or 01829 781343) before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009. We will not publish full addresses only the area.

Even if you are unable to attend the monthly meetings at Reaseheath, having a membership list will enable members to contact each other directly; so all you pig people out there or folk who live within a few miles of each other but never knew you were Cheshire Smallholders will be able to make contact and share ideas and knowledge with each other.

Whether it is about the animals you keep, or the forms you have to fill in, there is probably someone nearby who is faced with the same challenges and perhaps can offer helpful advice. Collectively, we have a wealth of knowledge and experience at our disposal and most smallholders are willing to share this free of charge over a cup of tea or coffee, or even over a beer or a glass of wine at the nearest pub.

Remember - None of us is as smart as all of us!

The phone around also produced two new committee members but no Chairman!

## From City Dweller to Smallholder, is like being carried along on the crest of a wave.

Following my upbringing as a Royal Naval (RN) dependent and my husband Mark's 24 year RN career we've had many house moves both national and international. Mark retired from the RN and started work as a civilian in Runcorn five years ago. Hence the decision was made to change our scenery from Seascape to Landscape. The thought of having land at that time terrified us. How could we possibly work fulltime and manage land, we just couldn't do it, so we bought a house with just ½ an acre in South Cheshire, it has to be the most idyllic place to live, we have the most fantastic outlook, over someone else's land, perfect!

A couple of years later we have new next door neighbours Paul and Helen, who, incidentally had also been City Dwellers. In June 2007 we bought six hybrid chickens, just to give us a few eggs. We gave them all names (we were never going to eat them). Much time has been wasted watching our girls' antics, but what a delight it is. How did we ever live without them! On a reciprocal basis we came to an agreement to look after the chooks when we go away. Paul and Helen bought four chickens and of course they were given names. Who would have thought we would be where we are today, from small beginning, as they say: Following the Chicken out programme on TV earlier this year, we couldn't support this way of rearing chickens for the table, so we obtained ten day old chicks to bring on. If we could do this, then the sky was the limit!

Paul and Helen's house came with eight acres, which the local farmer grazes and tidies up the hedges etc. The little field hadn't been grazed for a while and in the early summer this year was beginning to look rather untidy, the grass was thigh deep. It seemed very daunting, none of us had ever really been around farm animals, but to keep on top of the little field and after many discussions and a glass or two of wine, the four of us decided to go on the Sheep tasks course that Sue & Mark Shimwell ran in June for Cheshire Smallholders. It was a fabulous day. You may even have seen Mark's photo in the Gate magazine. We found the course very useful and it gave us the confidence we needed, we were buying our first sheep soon afterwards. The Holtridge Flock are formed. Helen and I had fallen for the Shropshire sheep that Sue & Mark breed, it was really important that they look pretty. We are townies after all.

We had also discussed doing a beekeeping course; there has been a fair amount of coverage in the media this year about the rapid decline of bees in this country and also worldwide. Mark and I took ourselves off to do this while Paul and Helen went off on holiday.

The sheep and bees along with the yet more new additions to our livestock, (three geese) being the gluttons for punishment that we are, Guy, Nick & Noel, no prizes for guessing when we intended them to go in the oven, are indeed keeping us entertained. All of this is with surprisingly little workload or perhaps it just feels that way as we are enjoying it so much, how different it is to sitting in an office all day! It's all been good fun (on the whole), one of the lambs, almost didn't make it. He had raided the chicken feed, (chicken feed can be fatal to sheep, which we didn't know at the time) Mark's naval training with dealing with drunks came into its own, the lamb is now fully recovered and the vets' bill was soon in the post, the joys of it all.



Following a glass or two I start to hear an echo, what about getting a tup in for spring lambs, we must be mad! Yet another new venture and another huge learning curve to come, I'm sure. We went to Chelford Rare Breeds sale/auction in September, and bought a Shropshire Ram. We had been told that he could be a few days settling in, before he got to work that is. He had covered Dolly, one of the ewes within about half an hour of getting out of the trailer! Tups do appear to be rather amorous. Assuming that Dolly took that weekend she is due to lamb around the middle of February (Valentines Day). Our ram is currently out for hire. Yet more work for him, I'm sure he doesn't mind in the slightest, we told him he was off for a little holiday to Lambsterdam. I know we're daft!

We hadn't expected to get any honey this year, but the clover crop came just at the right time, as we installed our first hive, how delicious it is too, so good news there! We had the bees inspected a few weeks ago; she was really pleased that they are doing so well.

We roasted the first of our geese a few weekends ago! Again they have been a delight to keep! They really do look beautiful on and around the pond. I think as much as anything we have been very lucky in the breed that we have chosen "Roman's" they are very calm and docile, not at all aggressive unlike some breeds. We are going to look into a breeding programme for "Roman's" in the spring. They make very good eating, which of course is an added bonus.

The next stage of the venture was looking to rear a couple of pigs; material for the shelter was sourced and built. Two Saddle-back gilts of about 8 weeks old arrived a week ago and are settling in well! We had to register the collective name for them with DEFRA, so we chose "The Holtridge Trotters". We just had to call them "Cassandra" and "Raquel". We are really looking forward to pork chops and perhaps a little bacon around March....

I have decided to progress my chooks with pure breeds this time and have a go at breeding a few, Silver Laced Wyandottes are my preference. I have placed an order and will be getting my breeders in April (when we return from our holiday in Thailand). It will be quite sometime before I get the first chicks from them I know but I'm on the look out for a small automatic turning incubator, but obviously no hurry yet!

The vegetable patches have already been progressed, ready for the spring planting.

Considering this is from someone that only a short time ago had a conscience about cutting and digging up veg from the garden, (in case it could feel it, completely insane I know!). While I don't think I will ever be involved in the killing of our animals, I can perhaps do the things that some of the others are uncomfortable with. The partnership is growing and going from strength to strength. To know that the food we put on our tables has been reared in a loving and ethical environment is so very important to all four of us. Mucking out, what a great way to spend your spare time!

As they say life is never dull, but then who would want it to be, if the truth be told?  
Yvette Openshaw

## Tony's Hen House.

During Jonathon's talk on chickens he covered simple henhouse construction. This inspired Tony to build one himself. There are no complicated instructions as it is a simple henhouse, the photos should be enough to get you going. You now have something to do between Christmas and New Year, just ensure you have bought the materials before Christmas. Just a word on plywood. Use WBP (Weather and Boil Proof) for external use (usually with a hardwood face) or external grade shuttering ply (usually softwood face), the glue used in both is waterproof. Marine ply is similar but higher quality and unnecessary for a hen hut. All types need treatment (paint or some form of rot proofer) to stop the wood from rotting.

### Tony's description:

Hen house was made after Jonathon Spibey's talk, where he recommended using plywood instead of planks to reduce hiding places for mites!

House is 6 sheets 8x4 exterior ply (1 off 12mm for base, rest 9mm walls),

3 sheets Onduline roofing,

3x 8ft lengths tanalised board for fixing roof to (6" x 1"),

1 pack of tanalised battens,

3 fence rails (1 for perch, 2 for base),

2 x 8 ft tanalised fence posts as bearers,

8 breeze blocks or bricks to stand it on so a) rats can't hide underneath, b) hens can shelter underneath.

All joints between ply & battens well glued to eliminate crevices. Shed is 8ft x 4ft, and 6' 6" high one side, 5' 6" other (minimal cutting of plywood sheets)

total cost about £160 (excluding blocks / bricks) plus 4 days labour!





### Sheep Ramp for the Land Rover

I have a small field and a second smaller area which I call the paddock. These enclosures are used for rams when I want them kept separate from the flock. When I want them back in the barn for whatever, and the ground is dry enough, I take the Land Rover and some hurdles to bring one of them back to the yard. I have found the ramp, shown in the sketch, to be invaluable for getting the animals loaded. I transport one ram at a time although if necessary two ewes is also a reasonable load.

The Land Rover chassis (series I, II III and Defender) have lugs provided for a swing down tailgate. My Land Rover, in common with many others, has a rear door swinging on hinges on the right hand side. The ramp shown makes use of the otherwise unused tailgate lugs.

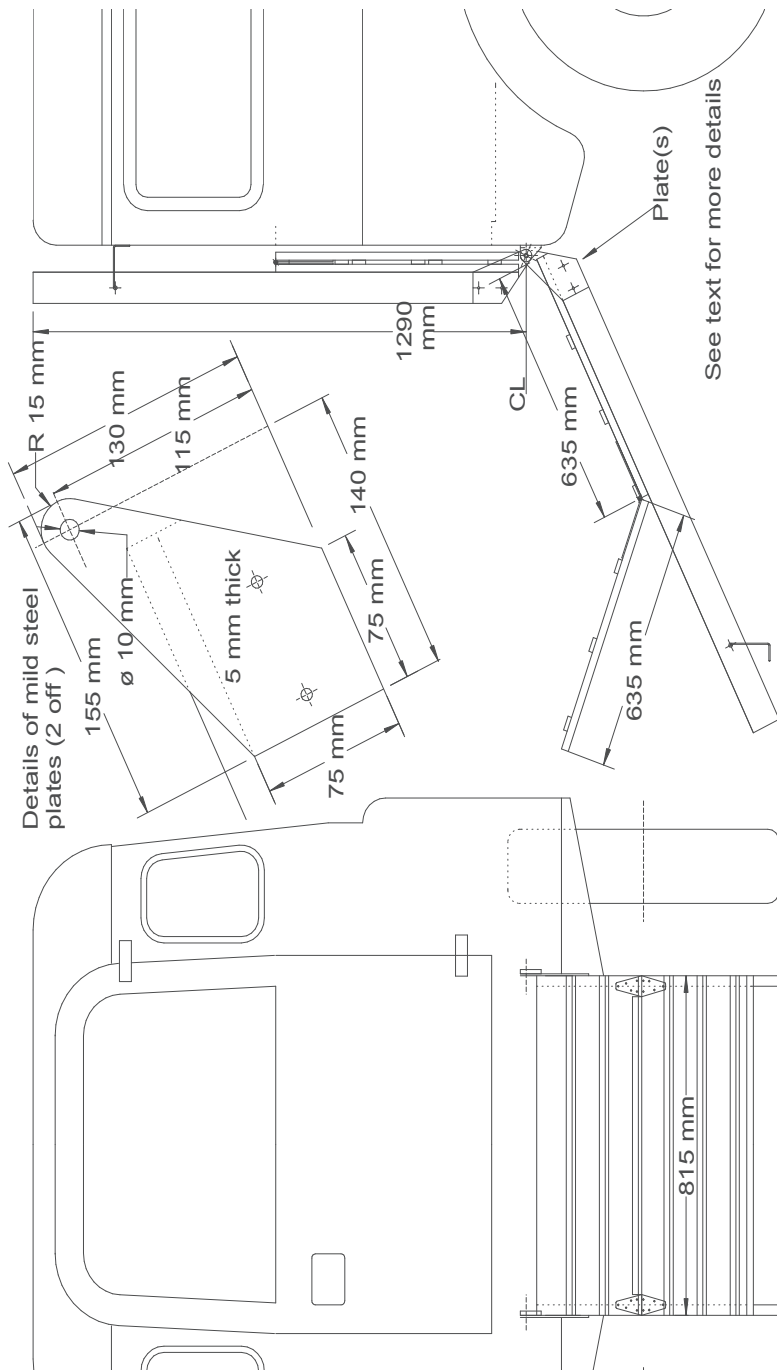
The ramp has been designed so that view through the rear door is unimpeded. The main spars of the ramp are two pieces of wood 75 mm x 25 mm in section and 1270 mm long. A steel plate is bolted on the end of each spar as shown and the projecting corner of wood taken off to give clearance with the back of the Land Rover. The centres of the pivot holes in the plates project beyond the end of the spars by 20 mm. When folded up the spars are the same height as the roof and consequently are protected from over hanging trees etc.

The working surface of the ramp is of 19 mm ply. The top section is permanently attached to the two spars. The lower section is mounted on hinges either side so when it is folded up it lies against the top section. The slats across the ply provide a foothold for the animal and are staggered so they fit between each other when the ramp is folded up. The hinge bolts are two 10mm bolts with Nyloc lock nuts. Both plates are on the left hand side of the lugs.

The ramp is held in the upright position by a hook which latches behind the top door hinge. I have a grill at the front of the load area inside the Land Rover to prevent the sheep/ram from joining the driver. This grill was made to keep dogs in the back of my Volvo estate - but that is another story.

One story worth telling however is that when I was at Clitheroe Auction two or three years ago I watched as a ram was loaded into a small 4x4. This vehicle also had side windows similar to my Land Rover. No sooner than the door was closed the ram smashed first one side window, then the other! My Derbyshire Gritstone sheep & rams are more docile and are happy to look forward to the ride!

Lawrence, Nov 08



Sheep Ramp for Land Rover

### **This Little Piggy Went to Market, This Little Piggy Nearly Stayed at Home.....**

Good news! Vicky's two Saddlebacks were up to weight, so time for me to volunteer to take them off to Jackson's on the Sunday. No problem. And as ever, I planned everything out in my head, just in case.

I decided that the small sheep trailer would be adequate, rather than the big cattle trailer, so on the Saturday, I washed the sheep trailer out *properly* from the previous sheep trip to Jackson's. And this is when things started to go wrong, as I had the strange urge to clean the outside as well, which involved removing lots of mud and several years growth of green mould. Suddenly, before I knew it, most of Saturday had disappeared as I had also managed to wash two cars as well. (Note: in my family, car washing is traditionally reserved for weddings and funerals only, so I figured it was fitting that the piggys would be making their final trip in a newly cleaned trailer pulled by a big, sleek, shiny, black hearse look-alike car). Everything was then parked up overnight, ready for The Trip.

I changed out of my Church "Sunday Best" in the afternoon, into the standard animal transportation uniform - warm hat, thick scruffy coat, old gloves, very old dirty jeans and the obligatory steel toe capped boots (Bunny huggers please note: these are not for "assisting" the animals into the trailer, but after having had toes flattened on many previous occasions by a whole variety of animals, they are merely for self preservation). The only protective equipment I didn't bring this time was the full chemical warfare suit and lead-lined underwear. I also brought the necessary pen and spectacles for the endless form filling, and of course, my Transport of Animal Certificate of Competence. (Admittedly it is only endorsed for cattle and sheep, and not pigs, but let's be honest, it is only 10 miles to Jackson's. And if I did get pulled over by a tall, handsome, young PC in uniform, would they really know much about the rules on animal transportation? They are more likely interested in whizzing the wrong way along the motorway at 120mph chasing drunken drivers and starring in Traffic Cops on TV, than two mad ladies taking piggys out for a Sunday afternoon drive).

Vicky had assured me that the piggys were very tame, and would simply follow her into the trailer. Personally, having spent many a joyous hour trying to convince Longhorn cattle that they really, really do want to leave their friends and load into a strange, rattling trailer, I wasn't convinced. I therefore loaded some hurdles and the obligatory bundle of bailing twine into the trailer "just in case", and I was off.

En route, I planned how I was going to get the Jeep and trailer up Vicky's drive, turn it round in the small space, and then face back down the drive, next to the piggy pen in the right position. However, when I got up the drive, I discovered that Vicky's car was still in situ - a bit of a challenge. (I should point out at this stage I do have a theory that there are only 3 things in the whole wide world that women can't do properly - whistle, spit and reverse trailers - so I knew I was on to a loser). I did have several brave attempts at Reginald Molehusband reversing, but gave up in the end, and resorted to unhitching the trailer and going for the womanhandling version of manoeuvring the trailer into position.

Meanwhile, Vicky had appeared, wearing "normal" coat, "normal" trousers, "normal" shoes and carrying a handbag - obviously she really did believe her piggys would simply trot into the trailer.



No 1 Son wasn't around as he's at uni, but as it was still only 2 o'clock in the afternoon and being a proper teenager, if he had been a home, he should have still been in bed. No 2 Son appeared, wearing "normal" clothes and training shoes. Hmm - I wasn't yet convinced this would be easy.

I surveyed the surrounding scene, and decided that we'd use the hurdles to create a penned area enclosing the trailer gates and the piggys pen gate. Hurdles were removed from the trailer, and connected up to produce a nice little corral. The pen gate was opened and out snuffled the piggys, all very calm. We then slowly coaxed and encouraged them towards the small ramp, and Big Pig gingerly took a couple of small steps up..... then chaos!!

I am used to handling (a) sheep, which are likely to jump over hurdles and (b) Longhorns, which are likely to simply flatten hurdles, but not (c) pigs. It seems that unlike most other animals, God has given them a snout. And this snout is excellent for rooting, and also for simply lifting up trailer gates and hurdles, and flinging them out of the way. Big Pig escaped and was going for freedom big time! Meanwhile, Smaller Pig thought he also should go for it but I quickly stood on the hurdles to stop them being hurled in a similar way. Rapid application of bailing twine to tie the hurdles kept Smaller Pig in place.

Big Pig then started the garden rampage run, so it was suggested that No 3 Son came to help round up. He dutifully appeared wearing shorts and No 2 Son's slippers. As this isn't ideal pig chasing apparel, he was charged with simply keeping Smaller Pig in the pen, while 3 of us dealt with Big Pig. Unfortunately, Smaller Pig had managed to make his escape and was keen to join in the fun. Ditching the handbag in favour of a pig board and the obligatory food bucket, Vicky and No 2 Son managed to get Big Pig heading back in the direction of the trailer. Big Pig continued in the direction of the trailer, but alas kept going, and headed off down the drive for the ultimate bid for freedom and the big bad world. After a Linford Christy inspired sprint, Vicky overtook Big Pig and slammed the entrance gate shut.

*Will Smaller Pig join the Tamworth 2? Will Big Pig get free again? Will the journey time be too long? Will Gill manage to reverse at Jacksons? Will the paperwork be right? Will Gill's transport certificate be examined? Will we all die of suspense? All will be revealed in the next exciting episode in March's Gate, or will it?*

### **Rare Breed Society Quiz**

There were six members of the CSA at the quiz, held at Croft Cricket Club. Following a challenging quiz and an excellent hotpot supper the papers were marked.

The tension was building as one team cheered their right answers (most of them). Then the suspense as the results were announced, the team that contained me (your chairman) and Margaret my wife were announced as the winners by a margin of three points. Then after the prizes had been awarded another team put in an appeal, the adjudicators went through their paper, the tension in the room was palpably building. The adjudicators then declared the results were wrong and the other team had not been correctly marked, it was a draw! There was a face off over the prizes and there were more of them than us. But wait - we put in an appeal, the adjudicators looked at our paper and decided ..... our paper had also been incorrectly marked, we had won by three points again. Sweets all round.

An excellent evening - thank you to Ruth and the other RBST organisers.

## Members Ads

Pedigree Ryeland Sheep for sale, Sept 2008, from Gill & Tony Moore, Nr Warrington, Cheshire. 01925 730530 See website for more details.

Coloured Ram: Somerford Fission, born 2005. Sire: Derwen Aztec, Dam: Somerford.

Coloured Ram Lamb: Amloch Khan, born 2008. Sire: Somerford Fission, Dam: Penllwyd.

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Large Chest Freezer, 3 1/2 years old. Working and in good condition ideal for smallholder £100 OR can someone store it and keep it running, will pay for running costs. Dresina - 07790604580

Land Wanted - Nr Macclesfield for growing fruit and veg. Contact Dresina as above.

## Other Stuff

### Gate

The next Gate will be produced in March. Please send me any articles, pictures, adverts etc for the next issue by the end of February 2009. (phone 07773780722 for email address).

### Web Site

([www.cheshiresmallholders.org](http://www.cheshiresmallholders.org))

If you have any articles or adverts for the web site let me know, pictures of your activities always welcome. I will continue updating the web site so keep on looking at it for latest news.

### Subscription Renewal

Subs were due in September, don't forget you can pay by standing order, this makes admin much easier. If you have not renewed this will be your last Gate.

## Committee Contacts

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## Job Vacancy

**Chairman** - experience not necessary, training will be provided. An excellent opportunity for an ambitious person to lead a dynamic organisation facing the challenges of updating to a 21st century leader in its field. Salary commensurate with experience to a maximum of £k per annum. Two year fixed term appointment. Call Kevin on 07773780722 for more information.