

Welcome

Spring is here and I am having to think about cutting the lawn, only thinking mind you. The docks are growing again in the field and I have run out of weed killer so I have started thinking about getting some more. I don't want to over-exert myself! In addition my normal supplier has gone bust, so I will have to find a new one,

We have had excellent lectures since this year's start in September and the high standard looks as if it will continue for the next two as well. Meetings have been well attended although we still make a small loss on each one.

At the last committee meeting I resigned as chairman, having exceeded my two year tenure, in order to allow me to spend more time on the web site and producing Gate. Arthur Green has agreed to take over as Chairman in the short term in the expectation that we will be able to get a new chairman and more committee members to share the workload.

So if you want to obtain better contacts within the association and learn more about smallholding please consider being on the committee. We have about five meetings a year and a committee dinner.

Kevin

Lectures and Visits

March 30 - Ferrets - Kim Lathaen will give 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 changes to legislation that you need to be aware of. Janet is also on the Council of The Rare Breeds Survival Trust and is very aware of the way legislation affects us.

There is no lecture meeting in May so we are trying to organise a visit. The last Monday in May (25th) is the Spring Bank Holiday.

Keep looking at the web for updates and visits. (www.cheshiresmallholders.org.uk)

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 entirely at your own risk.

January 2009

Ask the Vet - John Yarwood

John provided his usual informative, entertaining and humorous answers to our questions on topics ranging from fluke to Caesarian sections including topics as diverse as semen sexing, John's disease, Twin Lamb Disease and essential lambing equipment as well as the last minute question on worms just when he thought he had got away without one.

February 2009

Setting up and Running a Farm Shop by Andrew Shufflebottom of Cheerbrooks, Nantwich.

Andrew gave an excellent insight into the setting up and running of a successful farm shop. Starting with the original desire for a better income from the farm through to the present with the shop having won many awards and farming now being a hobby. The talk covered all aspects of setting up and running a farm shop. Andrew believed that attention to quality and consistency were the main keys to success along with good presentation. He sources the meat locally from suppliers who are able to guarantee supply throughout the year to a consistent standard of finish. This does mean that he is unable to accommodate small runs of rare breeds into the shop due to the difficulties of managing non standard products and the lack of continuity of supply.

Dates for your diary

Always check with the organisers before making arrangements or travelling, shows are sometimes cancelled, often at the last minute! Links to web sites are on www.cheshiresmallholders.org.uk/news.htm

Arley Horse Trials and Country Fair - Sat/Sun 23 & 24 May

Cheshire County Show - Tue/Wed 23 & 24 June - Info 01565 650 200

Nantwich & South Cheshire Show - Wed 29 July

Bakewell Show - Wed/Thur 5 & 6 August

Anglesey County Show - Tue/Wed 11 & 12 August

Denbigh and Flint Show - Thur 20 August

R B S T Show and Sale - Chelford, Sat. 19 Sept

Cheshire Ploughing and Hedge Cutting Competition - Wed 30 September

Future Lectures

What do you want to hear about? The time of year is up on us when the committee start the annual agonising about the programme of lectures for next year. This will normally continue until late this year when the final meetings are organised/confirmed. So please let us know what you want to hear about.

Please, please, please tell us which meetings you have enjoyed and which ones did not make you enthusiastic enough to attend. Please let any member of the committee know what you think. Also if you think you know someone who would be an interesting speaker please let us know and we can contact them.

Membership Update

At the beginning of the year the committee were in contact with as many members of the society as possible. You may have been the recipient of an e mail, telephone call or a personal chat if we met you in the street or pub.

Out of these conversations came the request for members to have the names and contact details of each other. In order for this to happen I asked via The Gate to contact me if you did not want your details shared and for personal reasons some members have asked for their details to be withheld.

However I am pleased to be able to include with this edition: Names, general area, and telephone number of our membership that will enable members to contact each other.

You may find you live closer to a Cheshire Smallholder than you thought.

I will try to keep this list updated and send out a new list to everyone annually. If, at any time, you decide that you would prefer us not to share your details in this way, please let us know and we will arrange for this information to be excluded from future editions.

Jane

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

The latest instalment in the trip from city dweller to Smallholder:

Just before Christmas, we took another fairly enormous step on our personal road to self-sufficiency:

We took the last two wether lambs that we bought as part of the original flock to slaughter and ate the offal (Liver & Hearts for supper) on the same day. Then had the carcass hung for 10 days. Wow, it makes it all worthwhile.

We ate the geese at Christmas, surprisingly it was quite a lot of work to dress them for the table but the meat was superb and well worth the effort. We miss the geese wandering around the pond, we are hopeful of replacements in the not too distant future. The cold weather we've had in the early part of the year has held up proceedings in this area.

We are now eating our own free range, organically fed chickens from our own chicken house.

Given the recent publicity, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Jamie Oliver and co have given us much 'food for thought', pardon the pun, with details of antibiotics, growth hormones and the terrible living/dying conditions of some mass-produced animals for the meat industry.

The Shropshire Ram that we procured at the Chelford Rare Breeds sale/auction in September, is now proven and our journey along the breeding programme road has begun. Yet another new venture and another huge learning curve.

Our first lamb arrived at 9am one Monday morning in mid February, just as we had been about to leave for the day jobs in the office! We've decided to call the lamb Holly and the intention is to breed from her in the future. We may even show her as we think she's quite a stunner. She was quite a big lamb weighing around 7.5kg at birth. Dolly (the mummy sheep) needed a little bit of help at the end, but Dolly and Holly are doing really well! Dolly has been an exceptional mother particularly given that she herself had been hand reared. An excellent result considering this is Dolly's first lamb and we didn't really have a clue what we were doing. As I write this we eagerly await the arrival of the next birth.

I was given a Silverr Dorking Cockerel early in the year, I've named him "Sylvester"; what a fine looking chap he is; my girls have been very impressed and as a consequence we've had ten chicks hatch out in the incubator; one unfortunately didn't make it through the first night, the poor little mite, but the others are growing well. The changes in them from one day to the next are incredible.

I think the four of us feel as if the new life in Holtridge is something along the lines of quite a major miracle at the moment. I can't see any of us going back!

The two Saddleback gilts that we got back in November "Cassandra" and "Raquel" have been great fun and the way they can turn over the land is truly amazing. I understand that it will be potatoes in that patch later in the year!

The intention had been to send both "Cassandra" and "Raquel" for pork chops and perhaps a little bacon probably sometime in March.... We're currently considering taking Raquel to the boar but as yet nothing has been decided.

I often wander down memory lane asking myself how I got from there to here. If I were back 'there' again, looking upon myself now, what would I think of the person I am today?

Could I aspire to such a lifestyle?

My reply back then would have been absolutely not and most defiantly no way, I wasn't even a wannabe!

It would have been beyond comprehension such a short time ago, but now I stand back and admire our livestock and enjoy them in life and on the plate.

There are probably quite a few people out there that are wannabes. Folk, who long to grow their own food, raise a little livestock and live the Good Life, but who would not know a bag of seeds if they jumped up and sowed themselves.

It's fine! Don't panic! If I can do this, you CAN do it! The gap between who you are and want to be is not as big as you think. If you start by taking little steps you will achieve success and gain confidence at an alarming rate. Just as we have! Never grown anything? Start with a few windowsill herbs or perhaps beans and shoots in a jar!

Never reared anything? Well, it's easier said than done if you don't yet have the space, but how about a rabbit or a couple of chickens in the garden?

Everyone is individual and will have had their own feelings on this very emotive subject. Don't be overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. It's all a bit acorn and oak tree really, but the journey is one of self-discovery and excitement and anyway, you have made the first step on your journey of discovery by joining Cheshire Smallholders!

Yvette Openshaw
Feb 09

Nature Watch - For the first time since it was filled (three years ago) the pond has frog spawn in it. I will have to move some of it though as the fish will eat the small tadpoles. Fortunately there is another small pond I can use. I have also seen a heron, fortunately not by the pond, yet. Last year a heron would wait patiently by the pond but we only have one fish unaccounted for. The buzzards have been overhead almost daily and are a joy to watch

.
Kevin

Beware of leaving the polytunnel door open in winter.



The chickens have found an alternative use for the polytunnel. The bed was full of soil level to the top of the wood before someone (not me!) left the door open. Now every thing, especially all the things on the staging, in the polytunnel is covered in a thick layer of soil. More work required to clean everything and refill the beds, at least the chickens are happy.

Has anyone any suggestions on why one of my hens is laying a tiny blue egg about once a week?

Kevin

An Ode

Many thanks to Vicky Mason

The winter might be over - the daffodils are blooming.
Shepherds tend their woolly flocks with lambing now a-loomg.
Smallholders, more prepared than most, thanks to the winter meetings
Are filled with veterinary facts to mollify the bleatings.
End product sales? Set up a shop - you know how it is done,
And vermin could well tremble if I only had a gun!
All this and more you will have missed if you did not take part
In those Monday evening meetings to explain the country art.
But next we'll have the ferrets, it is the year's highlight,
So ewes, please keep your legs crossed - I'll be out on Monday night!

Lamb Butchery Course

Nine of us gathered on a bright Saturday Morning to learn the art of butchering lambs from the expert Karol Bailey. The course had been oversubscribed so another



one is being planned for September. Karol started by showing how to cut up a whole lamb and all the main cuts of meat. And then after a welcome lunch we were let loose on our half lambs. Under the supervision of Karol we all managed to successfully produce good cuts of meat ready for cooking or the freezer. We also received a lot of advice on how best to cook the various joints and the different ways of cutting and preparing

the various cuts. An excellent course enjoyed by all who attended.

Future Courses

I am tidying up the list of courses to those which we have sufficient interest in and a possibility of getting a lecturer. See the lists at the meetings and on the web site. I will be updating the web site so keep on looking if they are not there today.

Beekeeping - There were not enough people still interested so we will not run a course, please contact the Cheshire Beekeepers Association they have four branches in Cheshire. (Hon Sec Malcolm Haynes 0161 491 2382, www.cheshire-bka.co.uk)

Food for Free - I had no response to the note in a previous Gate, and there are only three people on the list, for a day foraging with an expert this spring so we will look at that again when more people are interested.

Traditional Pig Keeping - Lots of people want this course so we are trying to find a suitable lecturer and will be in touch.

Sheep Tasks - We have two possible weekends for this one day course 2nd/3rd May or 9th/10th May. Contact Tony on 01925 730530 if you want to attend and have not heard from him. It will be run by Sue and Mark Shimwell and always receives positive feedback.

Bacon Curing - We are trying to organise this for the summer.

Pig Butchery - A new course that a few people have expressed interest in, we are trying to organise it at the moment, contact Kevin on 07773780722 if interested.

Silage/ Haylage/ Haymaking - We have been unable to organise a course on this due to the hands on nature and period of time it would take. Advice is to contact a local friendly farmer at the appropriate time of year and offer to help in return for advice.

Deep Hole Scoop

My design offering this time involves welding again! However it has been one of the most useful devises I have made. While digging a deep posthole with a spade, it enables one to lift out the spoil where previously I had to lie on the ground to reach in, and even then could only reach about two feet down with a trowel. With this devise one can dig a posthole as deep as one can reach with the spade. It is also invaluable for emptying drain sumps, i.e. Manholes/ gully pots where drain water collects and the outlet is above the base to trap the silt. The fit of the buckets also enables a certain amount of liquid to be lifted with the silt.

The important part of the design is the pair of buckets. They are fabricated from 3 mm mild steel plate. When the buckets are open they can reach to a corner of a square hole and the action of closing ensures that, in the case of a drain sump, all the silt etc. in that corner can be picked up. Similarly it is possible to produce a nearly flat floor in a posthole. The buckets have an overall diameter of 224 mm (8 7/8") and it is possible to dig a 9 1/2" or 10" square hole for an 8" square post leaving a minimum gap for packing the post tight.

The two buckets are identical. Each bucket has two tabs of 30 x 3 flat strip that provide the pivot point about which the bucket turns. One tab is welded inside the bucket and the other outside. The 3 mm thick end quadrants of the buckets are in line with the 3 mm thickness of the main frame that is made of 30 x 30 x 3 mm mild steel angle iron. When closed the buckets meet to contain the silt or debris. When open the bucket end quadrants fit either side of the bottom of the frame.

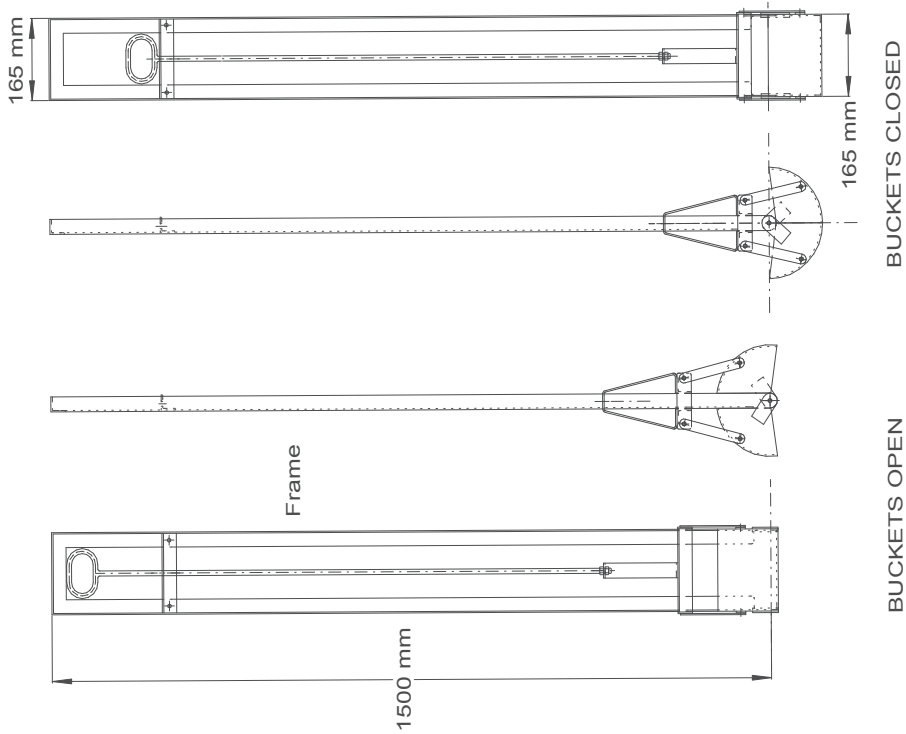
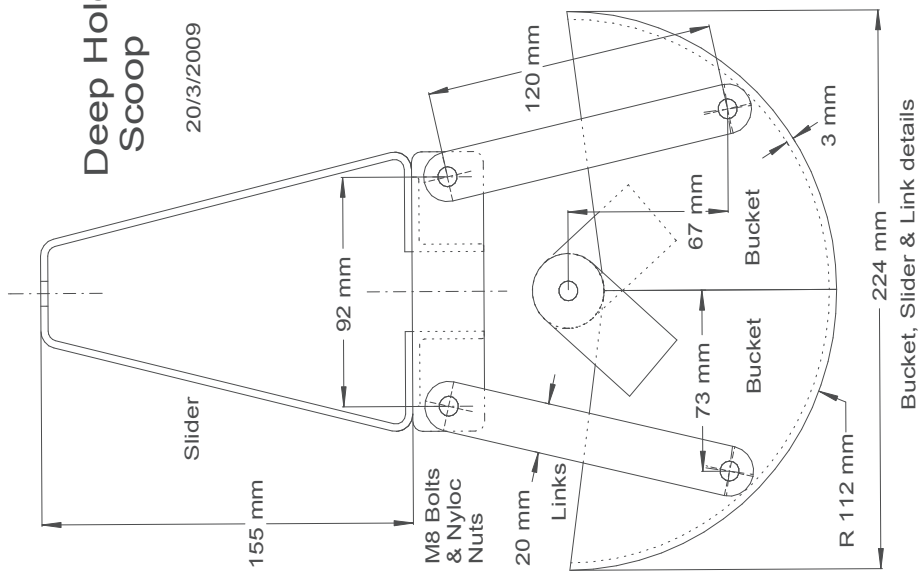
The buckets are each moved by two links of 20 x 3 flat strip. The links are attached to what I have called the slider. The slider is fabricated from two pieces of 30 x 30 x 3 angle with 30 x 3 flat strip welded at each end. A piece of 30 x 3 flat strip has been bent into the shape shown and welded to the top flanges of the angle iron. The slider is put over the bottom of the frame before the buckets are bolted on. The slider is raised and lowered by an operating rod made from 10 mm diameter black steel bar. It has a convenient handle at the top and is threaded at the bottom where two M10 nuts attach it to the slider. In general the operating action is to hold the bar down while lifting the frame up.

All of the pivot points use M8 set bolts with Nyloc nuts. The short crosspiece to guide the top of the operating bar has been bolted on with M8 nuts and bolts. As shown, the reach of the scoop is 1.5 metres although this could be longer or shorter as required. Having used it now for several years my only complaint is that the device is slightly on the heavy side. I think that the bucket dimensions are about right but the frame should be made lighter, perhaps of 25 x 25 x 3 angle. It is worthwhile to keep the mechanism oiled.

L. E. B. Heyshead Farm 2009

Deep Hole Scoop

20/3/2009



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

The story so far:

Gill has gone fully prepared with steel toe capped boots, old clothes, clean trailer, spectacles, pen, transport of animals certificate of competence (endorsed for sheep not pigs) to move Vicky's tame pigs. Vicky is dressed for a nice Sunday drive complete with handbag. We ended the last instalment with Big Pig making a sudden bid for freedom onto the road only to be thwarted by Vicky closing the gate following a run worthy of Linford Christy, in the meantime little pig has escaped the guardianship of son No 3 who was wearing son No. 2's slippers (Son No. 3 that is not the pig) and is following Big Pig's example (Little Pig that is not son No. 3) in an attempt to emulate the Tamworth 2. We rejoin the story at the climax of this escape bid:

The two piggys were now cornered, with the only potential escape being through the fence into the busy caravan sales centre next door. Being keen not to upset the genteel would-be caravaners with runaway pigs, No 2 Son blocked off their escape route. (Personally, I could think of nothing better than upsetting caravaners on a Sunday afternoon - they do it often enough to the rest of us as they dawdle along with their slow twee little houses on wheels!)

With a little active persuasion, the two escapees were ushered back into the hurdle pen, just where we'd been some 20 minutes previously, but this time we were prepared. Trailer gates and hurdles were securely fastened together with miles of bailing twine, and No 3 Son stood on the hurdles to prevent the snout flinging. The problem was, the bucket and Hansel and Gretel trail of sugar beet simply wasn't doing it for the piggy's, it just wasn't good enough to get them onto the ramp and into the trailer. The ultimate temptation was then brought, yes, carrots. A few were thrown on the ramp and No 2 Son almost got trampled as they rushed up and into the trailer to find the little scrumptious golden treasures. The trailer gates were securely fastened in a flash, and ramp closed instantly - we had them!

Vicky was now a quaking stressed sweaty wreck, which became a somewhat quaking angry stressed sweaty wreck when she realised that during The Great Escape, Big Pig had somehow managed to leave a big piggy poo on her handbag. No 3 Son was charged with clearing up the battle ground whilst the rest of us were to go to Jackson's. We clambered into the Jeep to complete the form filling: Loading start time - Was this 20 minutes previously when Big Pig took that first small step for a pig on to the ramp, followed by one huge leap for pigkind as he made his escape? We opted for the 5 minutes previously when No 2 Son was trampled in the trailer for a couple of EU reject misshapen carrots.

Expected journey time - Again this should be easy to guesstimate as its just along the road. But should I consider the time when I was returning from Jackson's with the big cattle trailer on a quiet Sunday afternoon and the petrol gauge wasn't working, so I managed to run out of petrol? And in that instance, I had the joy of two police cars turning up to "assist". I think they were bored, but really lost interest when they realised there weren't any fluffy animals in back. We went for the realistic predictable 30 minutes, and set off.

The journey itself was extremely unremarkable, and took about 20 minutes. The only items of interest were two dead pheasants near Tabley. Usually I would stop for such “food for free” treasure troves, but I thought that on the busy A556, there was a good chance I too would become road kill. Vicky was now returning to her normal self, but couldn’t seem to understand how I was ok. I explained that the loading had gone pretty much how I’d expected it and it hadn’t been particularly stressful at all - they are all like that!!

There was a “queue” at Jackson’s, i.e. someone else was unloading a couple of Jacobs so we waited. I then became the quaking, stressed, sweaty, wreck as I had to face my own personal demon of the day - reversing the trailer into Jackson’s yard at the same time as turning a corner. Aaaagghh!! The other people moved their empty trailer out of the way and now it was my turn, and what was worse - the lady was watching me. With gritted teeth, I started backwards, and ended up starting to jack-knife so had to pull forward. I gingerly set off backwards again, only to find a superfast Range Rover coming along the main road. It stopped, but the driver started to tap his steering wheel as I found myself slipping into Reginald Molehusband mode again. I swallowed hard and decided to go for it. I started off backwards, and Mr Range Rover sped away. This time, I got it right. Perfectumundo! Straight back, right into the entrance, and I was doing so well I think I could have gone right back into the pen. I could have trailer reversed for Britain! (At this point, bearing in mind my theory on whistling, spitting and trailer reversing, I began to think I should change my name to Jack from Gill).

Lovely, calm, quiet Mr Jackson appeared to show the piggys to their clean, well-prepared room for the night. The little dears trotted in as if butter wouldn’t melt in their mouth. There was then the obligatory look around to see what else was in and compare types, shapes and sizes. Farewells were said, and after yet more paperwork was completed, we set off back to Vicky’s.

The trailer was washed out, and hurdles reloaded at Vicky’s. I resisted the offer of a nice cup coffee, as it was getting to 4 pm, and I needed to get back home to feed cattle before it got too dark. Back home, I put the trailer away, and I must admit, reversing is so much easier in the privacy of your own field. I then fed the cattle, checked on the sheep, walked the dogs, made the tea, put the washing in, put the geese to bed, got things ready for work the next day and then did some paperwork. It had been a very successful day, and isn’t it good to know that Sunday is the day of rest??

Please Note:

Some of the names have been changed to protect the innocent, and any resemblance to the truth is purely coincidental.

Post Script:

I got home from work on Tuesday to find some lovely flowers had been delivered. Ooohh! Could they be from a very rich, handsome, secret admirer who wants to ply me with expensive exotic gifts such as a cattle crush or bull-proof post and rail fencing? No, it was from Vicky to say thank you for helping. It was very kind, but the lasting pleasure is the stash of pork joints and slices of dry cured bacon squirreled away in the freezer. Yum, yum!

Gill Lawson

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

Land Wanted - Nr Macclesfield for growing fruit and veg. Contact Dresina: 07790604580.

Hampshire Down Ram Lambs for sale contact Diane: 01829260134

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Other Stuff

Gate

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

Web Site

(www.cheshiresmallholders.org.uk)
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.

Volunteers for Cheshire Show
Wanted members to help at the show, spend a couple of hours talking to lots of interesting people. Phone 077 737 807 22.

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Job Vacancy, despite the current level of unemployment we still have the 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 £0,000k per annum. Two year fixed term appointment. Call Kevin on 07773780722 for more infor-