

## January 2009

With Christmas fresh and poignant in mind, with Epiphany still nearly to come, I'm drawn across fields to Leeks Land where Janacek is found among twenty-one wives. Janacek, the new-bought, round-plump, black-faced ram, idling over clover with the white fleeced ewes and with one in particular, Eyebright, who sticks close by him like gum. They make a fine pair these two: flirting in their playful, physical, sheeply way; self-conscious, you might think, as he's led on by her insistent, inquisitive beauty. I know: it's easy to invest the animals with your own thoughts and feelings, to ascribe to Janacek the nobility of a wise man or to Eyebright the delicacy of the flower after which she's named. This is Epiphany.

Subject change...

I've been reading over Christmas a paper which takes as its theme the treatment of calves born to dairy cows. Now under current arrangements, dairy calves are weaned or removed from their mothers during the first day or so after birth. Calves are typically bucket fed with milk, or placed with a foster mother. The cow herself is milked for human consumption.

This paper, published by the Louis Bulk Institute in Holland, suggests there are different ways of proceeding: ways of sharing the milk with the calf for the first three months of the calf's life without the need for any forcible weaning. In this approach the calf is permitted to stay with its mother and a natural bond between cow and calf is allowed to develop. I'm no dairy farmer but it does make you wonder. Would there be a market for milk produced in this way if it cost a few pence more?

Okay, I hear you asking: Who on earth is Janacek? (your starter for ten!). Well, he's perhaps not as well known as Fauré or Franck grazing on the other side of the fence, but he's a composer none the less. A nineteenth century Czech colleague of Dvorak with a special interest in folk music. Alright, I own up, I hadn't heard of him either until my colleague Bruce Easterbrook, a cognoscenti of classical music, introduced him to me. You see, registered pedigree breeders of sheep or cattle need a theme when choosing names for their animals. At Woodlands we've opted for composers and flowers. Selah!

With which...

In the arctic climate few things stir except your own blood tingling in a sudden adrenalin-rush. Four mallard rise steeply from the reed fringed dyke, the drake (no name) with females (ditto) forming themselves into a shard-like shape, a flying splinter soon over Chicken Holt into the pink of the sky and over, towards the Roman sea bank. I rub my hands, sensing the heat pour out of fingerless gloves. No heat in the sodden soil. The soil lies cold on the ground and on the road in wheals and ruts and puddles it would take a lifetime of tears to fill. January - a time of ghosts. Always January, somehow, when former characteristics re-assert themselves. The sea, the sea. This was once a watery, swirling, life-bringing tide.

The turkeys in the yard. Just breeding birds left in the big warm barn now with its weathered wooden doors. Stella feeds them corn twice daily and they answer in volumes less than before. Just breeding birds? Who knows? Perhaps there are birds we don't see. Strutting, invisible birds in the half-light of the mellow barn. January ghosts.

Bruce pours milled barley and peas into the troughs of the byre. With titan bravado the cattle jostle and toss their great heads. They paw the ground, the steam rises from their mouths and nostrils. They momentarily disappear from view.

## *Market Garden News*

All the greens of the rainbow may be found by the old Bullace tree. Glaucous dark cavolo nero, sea green kale, paler Brussels sprout tops, the deep maroon-green-silver of the January King cabbage. Laid out in strips they brighten the foreground of the view towards distant Frampton Church and beyond that the unmistakable beacon which is Boston Stump.

Fruit trees await pruning, there are artichokes to dead head, and spinach and chard to anticipate when the weather warms. For now, winter garlic shows in the row, its pencil thin shoots oblivious to frost; early lettuce in the polytunnels, still half-size. The carrots are struggling.

Parsnips, swedes. celeriac, pink fir apple potatoes, all the wintry soup things, with onions, yellow and red sweet enough to eat raw and cauliflowers on the horizon. We've ample stock and an Extras list you can choose from to supplement your box.

Autumn sown vetch peppers the beds in Crook Field. It needs spring warmth to fly and the broad beans ditto. We've rhubarb and raspberries to plant, and seeds to order after the holiday lull. Nut trees and fruit bushes are planned to provide chickens with shade...

## **BEEF AND LAMB**

**Orders are now being taken for Beef and Lamb boxes which will be ready for delivery the week beginning Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January. We also have some individual items available – joints, steaks, chops...**

**With warm wishes from us all for a very Happy New Year!!**

**Andrew Dennis**

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