

Easter Day, April 2009

Bruce Easterbrook had suggested to me that the cow named Doris wouldn't be long calving. We could tell from the way she lay down and got up and then lay down again. Leaning against the feed bar we watched the other cows regard Doris sympathetically, their great eyes conveying that measureless liquid-warmth unique to cows. One animal, a close relative, began grooming her twitching flank.

'Doris is an experienced cow', Bruce whispered.

'Last year she had twins. Maybe, in an hour or so...'

Just time, I thought, to nip down the road to see the potato planting. As quick as I could I hopped into the car and sped off towards Jinks Field near the sea wall.

I always enjoy this journey. Half way along, as marked by some white railings, the road turns sharply to the left. This is Tattenham Corner, so called by my grandfather, a keen racehorse owner, after the famous Tattenham Corner at Epsom racecourse. The Derby, held at Epsom since 1780, was a race he never won (one year he was third, with a horse named French Beige) however the racing connection persists and so round the corner I went with the dry dust flying behind. It was exhilarating and fun.

Years ago, in my living memory, the potato planting operation would've employed a small battalion of people, perhaps as many as fifteen folk, male and female. I recall how one group would unload the store, another would undertake the planting, and that perhaps as many as five tractor powered machines would be involved working down the land in readiness for the planter. Today just two people are involved in the field with perhaps one person in the store making a fivefold reduction in staffing levels.

'It's certainly dry', Charlie Briggs remarked as I walked over to see him. It certainly *was* dry. Charlie was in the process of power-harrowing the soil twice in order to try and work up the moisture.

Birds everywhere – so many birds: starlings, pied wagtails, black headed gulls, sand pipers, behind, parallel and in advance of the tractor in search of worms. I noticed the way Charlie moved slowly up and down the field at almost imperceptible speed. Why? Because power-harrowing takes time. The equipment's made to work hard.

'I call it *value time*', Charlie added, '*value time* in which to think'.

Tim, planting behind, showed me the field plan detailing the position of all the varieties: Premier, Swift, Nicola, Desiree, Orla, Sante – a rare litany of potatoes. These days we grow around a dozen different varieties whereas during the seventies we grew only one, Maris Piper for chipping. There's another difference: there's no need for anyone to sit on the back of the planter anymore. Tim can monitor the whole operation via a small TV screen inside the cab.

Beyond Jinks Field lies the perpendicular sea wall, a high wall of pale green grass fringed by rushes and scraggy thorn bushes. Today the blackthorn's caught by the sun. It shines brightly, like a lighthouse. Further on, the sea, the sea, its scent carried by the wind, its song evoked by distant snow geese alive in the blue.

I turn round and head back towards the cattle. Again the dust follows the car like swarming bees. Bruce's truck is still parked outside the great barn beside the big bales of haylage. It's so quiet, so quiet. The cows in the byre are silent. They have assembled in a circle as if to make room.

Silently, teetering on its Lincoln Red legs, the newly risen calf nudges its mother.

Market Garden News

The warm dry weather has given rise to great activity in the market garden. This past fortnight Simon's drilled or planted shallots, radish, turnips, rocket, broad beans, chard, lettuce, mixed salad leaves and more. He's also been working down the land. Mid March/early April is the classic time to plant and sow, weather permitting...

The first of our spring polytunnel crops – the radish – has started cropping. It's of really excellent quality. We're just hoping the leaves will hold out and not wilt before they reach you. To help matters we're watering the bunches once lifted. If this doesn't work we may need to 'bag' them.

Biodynamic pilot project update

Last week our new machine for making the biodynamic preparations arrived from Germany. Consisting of two copper barrels, a motor and a stirrer it has the capacity to make 500 litres of biodynamic preparations (essentially homeopathic tonics made by stirring and dissolving minute quantities of composted plants/ manure in water). The sprayer we need to apply the preparations, again in minute quantities to the soil and to the growing plants, has also arrived. The outcome of this pilot project should be fascinating... For now Adrian's storing the biodynamic ingredients in soil (rather as we used to store potatoes).

Beef, Lamb, Turkeys

Orders are now being taken for Lamb and Beef boxes, and oven ready Turkeys (limited). These will be ready for delivery the week beginning Monday 27th April.

Individual items are also available – joints, steaks, chops, Gobble burgers (turkey burgers) and boiling fowl.

Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis

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