

## March 2009

Today's battleship sky belies the moments of blue and lemon gold in which on St David's Day was carried a presentiment of spring.

Then, the drying land and the full flowering primulas so evocative of rebirth had bewitched us all. We walked through woods and found catkins fit to burst. Snowdrops lay in pools at the feet of the trees. Wings zigzagged delightedly over the hidden lake in which we saw the clouds. As if emerging from hibernation, creatures, insects and flowers studded a world which during the months of January and February had been too icy to stomach.

The weather changed again.

On Tuesday morning, a couple of blokes resembling Hells Angels roared into the yard on spanking new Triumph motorcycles. Si and Dave, better known as the Hairy Bikers of BBC2 had called to visit the Lincoln Red cattle. They appeared nonplussed by the wind.

'Good God, man' said Si, the hairier of the two.

'Are we in Siberia?'

They left their bikes behind and we struck off to the barn at Lammings where (out of the wind) Meshach the bull danced a merry dance and snorted at the camera.

Red-cattle- red, gold- straw- gold, March- mud- March, we saw all this and more, along with the line of the sea wall beyond. The cattle flicked their tails, the wind roared, and we felt the Russian steppes from which the wind arose before racing across the flatlands and the forests, and the onion domes of St Basil's to the waters of the North Sea. Which it duly crossed as if to disturb, oh my God, all that hair.

Come Wednesday, the hoar frost had painted the land a glittering white. The frost may be beautiful but it can also be antipathetic to carrots and cauliflowers and cabbages. It catches the carrot tops which duly break down and rot, it marks and spots the tender cauliflower curds and affects the heart of a cabbage. Jack Frost checks the growth of most plants leading sometimes to crop shortages. But frost also works in the farmer's favour. Frost helps to break down the soil to form excellent sowing conditions. It can clean the land and reduce the risk of disease in forthcoming crops.

Forthcoming crops... The weather changes again permitting cultivations prior to the sowing of spring cereals and beans. Adrian and the team have been discing and ploughing and muckspreading. As the land's turned over you sense the telling of a new story and you're filled with excitement. Once again you feel an identification with previous or retired generations whose life-experience and wisdom has shaped and made possible what we're doing now. It's said older people are our future. I can see why.

Over in Bullace Field, so called by my father after a solitary bullace tree growing on the field edge, we've tractor hoed the overwintered onions. Overwintered onions are always a challenge. They tend either to get waterlogged on our water-retentive soils, or they become infested with weeds such as dog daisy (or mayweed) against which they're unable to compete. Still, they're showing up well in the row, somewhat better than the shallots next door. Of the alliums the autumn planted garlic is showing the most promise. The crop looks great.

Just time to tell you of the Muntjak deer seen bounding out of the little spinney planted by my mother on the edge of Seven Sisters. She was helped by Fred Jarvis who worked at Woodlands for over forty years. It was windy that day too. Now this nimble footed, tiny emissary of spring...

## *Market Garden News*

Since last writing the garden has moved imperceptibly into spring mode. Broad bean sowing, radish drilling, the planting of the raspberry canes, all is going well while the spinach in the polytunnels is just coming into crop. Simon and Marcin have undertaken most of the drilling and planting jobs this week while Adam's carried out the picking for the boxes and the Farmers Markets.

When the wind came and blew the mypex mulch sheet off the new rhubarb bed it was a bit demoralizing! (It's not that easy to put on). Now the team has righted the situation and plan to plant the crop this week. The rhubarb's amounted to something of an exercise of patience this year. The weather seems to have been against us.

I'm hoping we should soon have meaningful amounts of sprouting broccoli. Our spring cabbage (which won the organic vegetable of the year award last year!) isn't too far away and we still have plentiful supplies of roots. It'll be interesting to see how long the first sown radish take to mature in the polytunnel.

## **Biodynamic pilot project update**

The BD pilot project is starting to take shape. We've ordered the equipment to make and apply the special BD preparations (homeopathic soil and plant conditioners), our BD crop rotation has been approved, and the pilot land is now officially registered as 'in conversion' with the BDAA (the Biodynamic Agricultural Association). Once converted the land will be both biodynamic and organic. More soon...

## **Beef and Lamb**

**Orders are now being taken for Lamb and Beef boxes which will be ready for delivery the week beginning Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March respectively.**

**Individual items are also available – joints, steaks, chops...**

**Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis**

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