

Twelfth Night 2010

Come morning the white winter snow may have melted. For now it lies over the earth like an eiderdown, speckled with rabbit and hare and moonshine. I can imagine the animals dozing on their haunches, alert to the wing beat of barn owl and hawk. Scarcely audible bird-flight, perfectly camouflaged.

At first I find walking across the night-time fields disorientating. I can't see much in the unfamiliar absence of light. One foot after another. And another. But after a while, if you care to surrender to them, I discover other senses awaken. The senses of touch, of hearing, of taste and of smell. I'm beginning to experience more fully, to exercise capacities which for the most part lie hidden. Like gold.

The fields are empty. As if resting. All this frost will break down the clods into soil which is malleable and fine. The snow is warming, gentle, animating. One foot after another. And another. The three Kings. Footprints in the snow, in the sand.

Between Christmas and New Year a deep silence was felt. Wash Road became a track imprinted by the feet of woodcock and of fox. No traffic ventured there. It was too icy. To the west the A16 fell silent. And then, quite suddenly, it was possible to hear different things: the roosting pheasant, steers across the way, the bells of Algarkirk Church. Just like the darkness as when walking at night, the absence of traffic brought different possibilities into play.

But not a lull entirely. The pipes had frozen. Even the great barn at Lammings was affected. Adrian and Bruce imported water from Struggs Hill two miles away in giant plastic containers, or cubes. Cattle, pigs, turkeys, chickens, all needed water. Bruce altered the feed to reduce the thirst of the cattle. He decreased the dry matter. Relief was felt when the thaw finally came and the taps flowed.

Frost still whitens the mornings making vegetable harvesting difficult. Better to wait 'til it melts before picking. Kale is resilient but the cauliflowers show signs of stress and the broccoli is over. There's no lack: glossy cavolo nero tips peep out of the whiteness, January King cabbages glow like jewels in the snow, all ruby red and green.

Still one field of winter wheat to drill (we were waiting to clear the land of its previous crop, then it rained). Mid January there'll be potato seed to box and chit, hedges to plant, and machinery to maintain in the farm workshop. Roy Burton 's designed and made a great piece of kit to assist with onion weeding, something I anticipate we'll be giving full use to once the crop's emerged in the spring. Keeping crops of organic onions clean is a great challenge, mainly because the onion, with its slender leaf, is unable to compete with weeds.

Just room to mention that Gavin and Stacey are re-united. We separated then after the birth of Stacey's last litter in July and once the piglets were weaned decided to prolong the break. Now Stacey's rested the two of them are running together again. 'Running' being the operative word. At first Gavin wouldn't leave her alone. They must've covered miles in their pen. Round and around they went, one trotter after another. Like ferrets.

And the turkeys. Soon the great cycle of rebirth will begin once more. The nights are drawing out. Soon the spring...

Market Garden News

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BEST WISHES TO NORMAN BANFIELD who retired at the end of last month. Norman delivered boxes to customers on the Bingham, Nottingham and Kibworth rounds . Thank you from us all Norman! You'll be much missed.
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Before snowfall, as soon as they emerged, Simon covered the broad beans with fleece. This was to protect them from beady-eyed hares and pheasants. We plan to drill more of this popular crop as soon as the weather permits.

Much of the garden is lying in the plough. In the first week of December we picked over the spinach, chard and parsley but these have now finished. We may get another pull in the spring.

We've just a few bins of squash left (these were stored inside) but soon they'll be exhausted. As we begin to use up last year's crop our minds turn to this year's cropping. Adrian will soon be ordering the seed so if you have any ideas please let us know!

Biodynamic pilot project update
All the kales and the cauliflowers presently supplied in your boxes are registered biodynamic *and* organic. For interest, biodynamic status will apply to many more crops at Woodlands this coming year including sweetcorn and celeriac. I'd be interested to know if you notice any taste difference. Turkeys, pork and eggs will follow...

BEEF, LAMB, PORK, TURKEY Individual cuts of meat and oven ready birds are available to order on-line with your box or by phoning Rachel on 01205 724778.

**Happy New Year!!
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