

February 2010

Nine sheep graze beneath a pale grey sky, the grass still green, the thorn hedge saffron, leafless. It's February.

On the edge the figures stoop and stretch, stoop and stretch. Glint of spade as hedgelings are pushed into slit of soil and heeled over. Four hundred meters covered, more to go. It's February.

Tim rotavates a strip a meter wide, the planting troupe lays mulch behind. Plants follow - hawthorn, blackthorn, crab apple, plum, (feasts for birds, jams, crumbles). Among them taller trees – oak, ash, crack willow, more. I try to imagine the effect of this rural architecture. How vistas might evolve, which eggs could hatch and where, how the hedge-dapples will fall over the delph, which inland fishes and sea shrimps might bathe in those dapples.

January over. The land is wet. The dykes are full. Some almost bursting. This part of Lincolnshire is known as Holland. Water is seldom far away.

There are great ruts and wheals in the brassica fields where Mark continues harvesting. The rig resembles a hippopotamus. I watch it slide in the deep, unforgiving mud of the gateway. In the field it struggles to keep a straight line. Cabbage rows, pigeon nibbled kales, Brussels sprout stalks standing tall like miniature Eiffel towers. Frozen January has taken its toll. We pick where we can.

This is the time to make and fix. Land work's impossible (still one field of winter wheat left to drill). Roy's servicing the beet hoe and the onion toppler; Peter, Jonathan and Tim have rebuilt one of the trailers; Andy's restoring some older pieces of kit dating back to a time before his time: horse drawn ploughs circa 1930 (you'll be able to see them on our Summer Open Day, 11th July). Artist in residence, Rosie Redzia, has been drawing Roy as he works.

One group of folk is especially pleased the snow's gone. It was quite funny: for a while they appeared to live on springs, or a trampoline. In order to avoid the snowy ground they hopped about like Zebedee in the *Magic Roundabout*. This didn't make life easy for poor Stella. Once *out* they refused to go *in* again. In the dazzling white field they lost their bearings. Now there are more challenges. Earlier this week Chris and Peter mucked them out (a job in itself) after which they've become wary and unsettled. It wasn't the mucking out so much as the fresh wood shavings. Stella's theory is that they're highly sensitive to smell. (*Who are they?*)

It's February. Most mornings batches of seed arrive like Christmas parcels. Adrian's prepared giant spread sheets on a crop by crop basis giving all the land areas, the seed spacings, the drilling dates and the proposed harvesting dates. At the same time he's arranged meetings with plant raisers and seed merchants and obtained derogations from the Soil Association where organic seed isn't available (rare these days). It's a big responsibility. We've now chosen the crops for the market garden. Most of them will be coming from Tamar Organics in Devon.

Down at Lammings the cattle are inside. It's a joy to walk along the central aisle of the barn between the rows of feeding animals. Bruce puts the haylage on the floor and the cows help themselves by outstretching their long trunk-like tongues. One cow stays back, her head held high. It's Flash, the herd mascot. She's very handsome (and knows it).

Market Garden News

As with the farm it's been too wet to get on with much land work. Simon's been hoping to lay the mypex for the rhubarb since before Christmas!

The blackberries and raspberries have been pruned and this leaves just the currants to muck and tidy. Today Adam and Marcin are making a start on the strawberries (removing dead leaves).

We've hand wed the garlic and when the soil dries plan to brush hoe the shallots and winter onions. Also the spinach and chard. Next week I plan to finish dead heading the artichokes.

There have been several frost-casualties this winter. Cauliflowers, Russian kale, cavolo nero, sprouting broccoli. They've all suffered. And the birds. I've seen numerous woodcock this year. They're rare visitors to the fens.

Soon March: it won't be long before we start planting the polytunnels. The daffodils are pushing through.

POETRY LAUNCH

Copies of *Treasure Ground*, Clare Best's newly published collection of Woodlands Poems, are now available to order direct from the publishers HappenStance Press (see enclosed order form) or from Woodlands for £4 per copy. Clare was writer-in-residence at Woodlands from 2005-2006. A reading and book launch will take place at the farm on Sunday 7th March. Details to follow...

BEEF AND LAMB

Individual cuts and boxes of beef and lamb are available to order with your box either on-line (see the Extras page) or by phoning Rachel on 02105 724778. *Oven ready turkeys also available on special offer!!*

**Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis
Tel 01205 24778
www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk**

