

March 2010

This newsletter is dedicated to Joe Rowett, a great friend and colleague at Woodlands, who died on 9th February in his eighty-seventh year. Joe, who retired at Christmas, worked at Woodlands nearly all his life. He harvested brassicas, graded and planted potatoes, rogued wild oats, weeded onions, followed the horse plough and more recently helped me set up the organic turkey enterprise. He was a true man of the soil, a gifted gardener, and he had a lovely sense of humour. This newsletter focuses on a few of the things which were of interest to him.

Today the land lies still where the thrupenny bit-shaped cottage once stood with its low whitewashed walls and sheet tin roof at the bend on Wash Road. Beyond it, the pit in which eels were caught on warm summer nights, and on one occasion a giant pike, has long since been filled in and thrown to the field. Joe lived here in his early married life just a stone's throw from the Piggery. He kept Rhode Island Reds, a wonderful garden and offered haircutting services to selected clients on Sundays. When the rain fell on the roof you were made to feel part of the field.

A small flock of turkeys has foregathered under the osiers. As if caught up in the intensity of the trees they've ceased their gobbling. These birds are the descendents of the birds raised in the crew yard at Deans some fifteen years ago. Norfolk Bronze turkeys, plump as church bells. A hen once sat on sixteen eggs and all but one of them hatched. How the mother hen clucked and worried over her chicks and shielded them with her brindle wings. When the summer came and Joe opened the gate she ushered her brood into the garden for the first time, step by inquisitive step, blinking into a world of green. It was fascinating.

Today the yard's humming with activity. In the mouth of the barn Adrian's set up a giant hopper into which the team have tipped the seed tates. The tates are moving slowly forward. They're being prepared for chitting. Peter (half Joe's age), Jonathan (a third), Andy and Chris (a quarter) are feeding the seed into wooden trays. Valor, Sante, Nicola. Roy's then stacking them.

('Have they opened their eyes yet?' he'd ask)

The trays tell a story. Each one bears the name of the farm along with a date. The oldest we can find is 1967, some 15 years after Joe started working here.

His tates always were ready before ours!

Barn owl over Hemplands, the sea green brassica field. Foot prints of hare and fox in the chocolate brown mud. This is where we cut caulis, bikes slung in the dyke, back and forth across the field, a row of five men, fen slodgers, Joe being one, my brother David and me beside him. Once, when David was driving, the steering wheel of the Massey tractor came off. David passed it to down to Joe and asked him if he's like to drive. He liked that.

The farm is so wet. The ewes have been brought in for lambing and look eye-catching in their warm straw bedding. I lean over the gate and watch them munch the sweet smelling hay. They look straight back at me. One or two of them stamp their feet as if to ask *what are you looking at?* Our first lambs are expected on 1st March, St David's Day.

Surrounding the barn at Lammings Joe's trees are growing away.

Market Garden News

Soils are wet while cold weather stifles vestiges of new growth. This week we've abandoned ideas of outdoor planting in favour of polytunnel work. Simon's drilled radish, turnips and broad beans, a fourth house has been put to new potatoes (variety Swift). These crops have been watered in and should grow away fast.

Despite the cold, rhubarb shoots are emerging, pink the colour of Brighton Rock. I doubt we'll be able to plant new crowns this year. It's been impossible to lay down the pre-requisite mypex mulch without which rhubarb on these soils is quickly overwhelmed. By weeds!

The team is tidying the strawberries (removing last year's leaves) while nearby daffodil shoots prick up, asphodel-yellow buds glimmering through the stems. Nearly spring...

Biodynamic pilot project update

Cavelo nero and kale on our biodynamic land is looking stunted now with new growth limited by frost. The spring greens further along are in better heart, the challenge being to somehow deflect the pigeons (Mark's trying all manner of ingenious methods). There are still some cauliflowers left to harvest. We just need warmth to bring them on.

BEEF, LAMB, 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.

PORK

Fresh Pork will be available the week starting Monday 22nd March. Please order asap by phoning Rachel. It goes very quickly!

**Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis
01205 724778
www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk**