

Should your Chairman be concerned?

Well here we are once again, hiding those presents from the kids (and my Wife). With the financial state of agriculture will we be able to fund those presents I wonder. YES, of course we will, next year is a new period to face the future and overcome all the new rules the E U have and intend to throw at us.

But first the last twelve months have been a concern for all your Committee as we could see very few members coming forward to assist the stalwarts who seem to continue to shoulder all the posts and attend every meeting. My concerns have been expressed through this Journal over the last two issues and at each of our monthly meetings. I was more and more convinced that we may have to wind up in the New Year and I was getting ready for the heartache and repercussions.

Throughout it all though the Association has continued to offer evening meetings, weekend courses, advice and help to its members. Not the least has been the influx of people who are anxious to be able to butcher their own meat or to improve the manner in which they looked after their sheep. We have been extremely well served by the tutors and they are entitled to our heartfelt thanks. There have also been a continued small number of new members arising from our redrawn leaflet and our Treasurer was able to point out that our financial affairs were healthy. He had even been able to reduce some of our costs. I am beginning to feel we might make it after all.

And then!!!. Leading up to the A G M and after, some of our members felt they could help and have taken on a few of the duties necessary to running a County organisation. The old Committee are breathing a little easier although many still do too many jobs. I can see that there is a possibility of the Association carrying on. The College have recently indicated they would like to get involved and I have seen interest from R B S T members and The Cheshire Show.

So, should I still be concerned, yes of course I should, but that is the Chairman's job. I intend to ensure that we all keep our eye on the ball and do not become laid back. We need to ensure we continue to fulfil the ideas of the C S A. At the moment it looks as though we can look forward to a long future. I am sure we will if we all help.

So have a very Happy Christmas and New Year, may all your young stock be healthy and fruitful. Finally I hope to welcome you all at our meetings in 2010.

Arthur T. Green President and Chairman.

Lectures

25 January 2010

Ask the Vet with John Yarwood - Our annual session with John.

Who is going to ask about worms this year, who is going to rise to the challenge and ask the question with the most humorous answer?

22 February 2010 - How we farmed and fared in the forties.

Norman Godden tells us what life was like for farmers in the forties when small-holding was a necessity for many rather than a life choice.

29 March - Alternative Energy

Irrespective of your views on Global Warming come and hear how to save money by using alternative energy. Grahame from Raine or Shine tells us how. www.raine-or-shine.com for a sneak preview.

April and May - TBA

We wanted to do a talk on setting up a smallholding. We could not find any one organisation that could give advice as there are so many different organisations involved. Arthur is preparing a guide which we hope to distribute in the new year once we have made sure it is correct.

Doors open 7.30 for 8pm start. Entry £2. Notice board for ads, sales table, tea and coffee available. Room L3/L4 The Leverhulme Centre, Reaseheath College, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DF. Come early and have a chat.

Future Courses

Not much of an update since the last edition. We had an excellent course on Pig Butchery, many thanks to Karol Bailey. I along with four others have a freezer full of excellent pork. The second of these courses is being run in January. The photographs below illustrate the difference between cross breeds and rare breeds.



Nicky is holding the layer of fat from the stomach cavity, the photo on the right shows two excellent chops. No prizes for guessing which is the rare breed.

We are in discussion with Reaseheath about possible courses they can run for us and we will keep you posted.

Keep looking at the web site for latest news.

Kevin

Lecture Report

Keeping Pigs - September

With the benefit of nearly 30 years of pig breeding Frank Miller was able to talk, without notes, informatively and entertainingly for nearly two hours without hesitation, repetition or deviation to an appreciative audience.

He started by giving the two questions prospective owners should ask:

- 1 - Why do you want pigs?
- 2 - What are you going to do with the offspring?

For newcomers he suggested getting a couple of weaners, fatten them up and slaughter, sell $\frac{1}{2}$ to friends and keep $\frac{1}{2}$ for yourself.

When you have experience then get a gilt and breed from it. He said never buy a pig unless the owner is emigrating or giving up as you will almost certainly buying problems.

After telling us that pig keeping was fun he then told us (tongue in cheek?) why we should not keep pigs as currently it is not economic as a commercial operation.

Some of his suggestions included:

- Unless you have 8+ pigs borrow a boar;
- Breed at 8 months old;
- Pregnancy lasts for 3 months 3 weeks and three days;
- Birthing needs no assistance unless lasts for more than two hours in which case call a vet;
- Don't cut teeth - does not cause mastitis in sow
- Don't cut tails, give them a football, only chew tails if nothing to do;
- At 8 weeks take mother away from piglets not other way around;
- 21 day standstill on movements, shows have different rules;
- Normally take sow to boar;
- When accessing condition: - if can push finger an inch into back - too fat, if very hard not fat enough;
- If you are rich produce pork otherwise sell weaners, selling weaners is difficult, you will get 28 weaners a year from a sow so need to know how you will get rid of them;
- Bacon pigs (26-30 weeks) are not much bigger than pork pigs (16-18 weeks);
- Can't feed swill any more;
- Pig exhibitors are a very friendly bunch;
- Tamworths need six foot high fencing buried two feet in the ground;
- Long ear breeds need single strand of electric fencing one foot off ground (see Jane's experience in this edition);
- Boar taint is a myth.

The above is a very short summary of his lecture which would need a book to do justice to its scope and depth.

Kevin

October - Organising the Cheshire Show

Nigel Evans, Chief Executive of Cheshire County Show, gave the CSA AGM attendees a behind the scenes view of what it took to organise the Cheshire Show. Nigel is the only full time appointee and he is supported by 3 part time assistants and 300 volunteers. The volunteers being crucial to the organisation. There is a council of 60 members which have the same problems of succession as the CSA. They also have 1200 members.

A survey of attendees gave the most popular reason for attending as "Seeing the animals" with "retail therapy" second. Retail therapy subsidises the animals. Of the animals:

- Cattle have lots of attendees;
- Sheep are improving;
- Goats are improving;
- Rare breeds - Increasing
- Light Horses - 3,500 entries and is qualifier for Horse of the Year Show;
- Show Jumping - OK
- Shire Horse - Improving , going to move to one day show;
- Dogs - 2,000 entries;
- Poultry - After a low two years ago now with John Tickle managing it has achieved championship status;
- They may have Alpaca classes next year instead of the Royal Lancashire.
- The WI tent is the biggest in the country, having the calendar girls next year.

In October they are: booking trade stands for next year; booking Judges and accommodation (using B&Bs to help local economy); preparing schedules; getting entertainment; and preparing marketing strategy.

Membership is a bargain at £35 giving two tickets for two days. 85,000 people attended this year with the second day being the busiest for the first time.

Compliance is a nightmare with E-Coli, Health and Safety (people, horses, tents, cattle, dogs, machinery, etc), Fire Regulations (won't say in advance what they want).

Finally he knows that Loos are a problem.

Many thanks to Nigel for an excellent insight into the organisation of a show, I do not think there were many who envy his job.

Kevin

Help Needed - Field Names - Withins and Pingots

Various organisations including the English Place Name Society and the Womens' Institute have made collections of field-names and Chester Society for Landscape History is hoping to make a record with a difference. Rather than produce just a list of names, it hopes to try to relate the choice of name to the nature of the field - why was such a name chosen to describe a particular field? If you have an old map listing field-names and can help, please get in touch with Mike Taylor (01925 263184).

Mike

November 2009 - Going, Going, Gone, views from an Auctioneer.

Gwyn Williams, a partner at Frank Marshall & Co, of Chelford Market, gave us an insight into his life as an Auctioneer.

He started off life in South Wales, raised, with 3 brothers, on a farm, which two of them still run today. He got involved at the local livestock market at a very early age, helping out around the livestock. His particular role was 'punching' sheep, notching their ears as a mark to show that the Government subsidy had been paid out. He soon realised that he wanted to become an auctioneer, and was given the chance, starting off with backup from his boss, but quickly moving on to handle the whole show himself.

He went on to obtain qualifications as a chartered surveyor and valuer, and moved up to Cheshire to take up a post with Marshalls, continuing on to gain further qualifications on the way.

Gwyn gave us a slide show of the varied activities at Chelford Market, including shots of various livestock sales, moving on to the Horticultural Sales, which include Christmas trees and Pumpkins as well as bedding plants and shrubs. In fact Chelford market is now the biggest Horticultural market in the UK; and it all started a few years ago with diversification into selling a few potatoes and other vegs.

The slide show was followed up with a series of discussions, varying from the latest info on EID (Electronic tagging) for sheep, which will be compulsory for lambs born after Jan 2010, through to the economics of livestock selling, and the protocol of buying and selling at a livestock auction. For anyone intimidated by the whole process, Gwyn suggested contacting the auctioneer (a few days) before the show; most would be willing to explain how things work, and to help with identification of the buyers needs. He was very adamant that doing some homework on the presentation of the livestock before the sale paid dividends at the sale.

Overall it was a very interesting and informative talk, and a great insight into the business for those who are not regular attendees at livestock markets.

Tony

Fruit Tree Pruning and Grafting

First the good news: Gill reports that the free pruning course recently run by FWAG was excellent and very enjoyable apart from her realising how neglected her trees are.

The bad news is that you can spend £45 on a grafting course to be run by one of the pruning lecturers, Tony Adams. These courses will be run on the 6th and 7th March 2010 near Oswestry and include four trees for you to take home. Contact Tony on 01691 777512 or www.countrysidecrafts.co.uk.

Confessions and Experiences of a Novice Pig Owner

Back in sunny September I went to a smallholder's lecture about pigs, given by a chap who clearly had kept pigs for years and was very knowledgeable. He was a real enthusiast whose chosen breed was the British Lop, he had bred and shown pigs all of his life. I came away from that thinking thank goodness I hadn't been to that talk before I had got my first pigs....I'd never have risked taking the plunge. So instead I now drove away thinking 'my poor pigs - I haven't been feeding you anything like enough or doing it right at all'!

Two years ago I bought a couple of Saddleback gilt weaners, they cost me £30 each at 10 weeks old, and came with half a sack of feed and some wormer. I knew absolutely nothing about pigs - but pigs are pretty forgiving creatures, and I think will fit in with all sorts of rearing arrangements. The only thing I did know was that they would take some serious fencing (I had initially set out to get Tamworths, but the peels of laughter and general shaking of heads from anyone who knows anything about pigs made me think perhaps not....yet). So with two strands of electric fence wire (6" and 18" above ground) enclosing a 30 x 40yard paddock with a home-made pig arc (materials cost - £100) in the middle I brought my two new weaners home.

Lesson 1 was that you can't herd pigs like you can sheep....in fact they don't behave like any other farm animal. I learnt this on trying to get them out of the trailer....they just go where they want to and have an amazing vocabulary if you try and stop them. I literally had no idea how to get them from A to B so decided to keep them in a stable for a few weeks until they had got to know me and I them. I now know FOOD is the key to moving pigs, that, and barricades so they don't have a choice..... every piece of board, old door, sheep hurdle and even pieces of cardboard have been used to create barricades when I'm trying to move my pigs.

After a couple of weeks I put them out in the paddock, they promptly got an electric shock, ran through the fence and away across the field - they were very traumatised by the electric fence, but fortunately now saw me as 'friend' and slowly with food I enticed them back into the pen, put the fence back up and switched onand then repeated the whole saga again.....and again:- hit fence....get shock....squeal as if being murdered..... run forwards into fence....more shocks..... charge across field leaving electric fence trailing. This happened three times, I was about to give up and resigned to putting stock-proof netting up, but then it never happened again - they broke out 3 times in the first hour, then never again in the next 5 months! This has been the same experience with subsequent batches of pigs I've reared - they will break out of electric fence a few times.... And then they learn.

Back to those first pigs: I had been advised to give Pinky and Perky (sorry) one scoop of corn morning and evening (~ 1.5kg/hd/day) and as the weeks went by and they grew I thought they would need more so increased that up to about 3kg/hd/day. They went to the butchers at about 7 months old and were very very fat with > 3cm layer of subcutaneous fat. The butcher told me he aimed for around 1cm of fat...oops.

Last year we reared 2 batches of 3 pigs (weaners cost me £25 each this time...even better). It seems that young pigs use their food to put on muscle whereas older pigs just put on fat, so in fact I was wrong to increase the ration as the pigs grew - and I now feed them a flat rate of 1.5kg/head/day right up to butchering at around 7months old.....Last years pigs had about 2cm layer of fat, which is better.

This year so far we've done a batch of 3 Saddlebacks (reared May to September) and have 2 Gloucester Old Spots paddling in mud at the moment - bad planning as I'm going to have to house them before sending them off in January, I won't have pigs through the winter again.

Finally just a little info on the butchering costs: I've found costs vary greatly depending on where you go, the most recent trio of Saddlebacks cost me £75/pig to kill and cut using Jackson's abattoir and Heathcotes butchers in Bollington. They made an excellent job, made me lots of sausages and vac packed and labelled everything. The loins and bellies I took down to the Cheshire Smokehouse where they cured, smoked and packed 4 loins and 2 bellies (~100 packs of bacon) for me at a cost of £75.

Even though a lot of it is destined for home consumption I priced up every cut before it went in the freezer to get an idea of the total value each pig was worth - these 3 worked out at £380 worth of meat / pig. I have found that free range reared pork is not difficult to sell as it tastes *wonderful!* Just let a few friends or colleagues know that you have some and they will be queuing up..... those last 3 pigs I mentioned?... it's all gone!

Jane Watkins Nov 2009

Members Adverts

Petrol Generator

Clarke's 1kw single phase 250 volt. Briggs & Stratton 4 HP engine. Bought for sheep shearing in fields, used about 10 times. Contact Mike Taylor on 01925 263184

2 Cream Legbar cockerels for sale (blue egg gene) in Delamere/Oakmere. Contact Nicky for more details on 01606 301331

Small Bale Hay 2009

Jane has a supply of this year's hay for sale, it is good quality and is in the region of £2.00 per bale depending on quantity. Phone Jane on 01829 781343

Pedigree Ryeland Sheep -

Oct 2009, Ryeland ram lamb and coloured Ryeland ram lambs for sale from Gill & Tony Moore, Nr Warrington, Cheshire. 01925 730530

Land Wanted - Nr Macclesfield for growing fruit and veg. Contact Dresina - 07790604580

Shepherd - Doug Edge is a member and freelance shepherd who can help with all aspects of sheep care including shearing, foot trimming and all aspects of sheep work. He comes with a recommendation from other members. If you need help contact him on 07967961112

Sheep Netting Wire Tool

This is my design for a small tool to give a convenient way to finish off your sheep fencing and making it smart as well! To anchor the end of a section of netting is often taken right round a post for strength. The tails of the horizontal wires are then twisted round the corresponding horizontal wires in the working part of the netting using this tool. This tool can also be used to join lengths of netting and take the slack out of your fence.

My drawing uses metric dimensions but in truth I used a piece of $\frac{3}{4}$ " square steel. The length (80 mm) is the maximum permissible to pass through the smaller rectangles of sheep netting. You will notice that the two sides of the tool are symmetrical. This is to allow both left and right hand twists to be achieved. The holes and slots are chosen to accommodate the larger gauge wire at the top and bottom of the netting. These wires are approximately 0.125" diameter and the 3.5 mm holes give an easy working clearance. However the tool works equally well on the thinner gauge wires (0.095" dia.) used for the other strands.

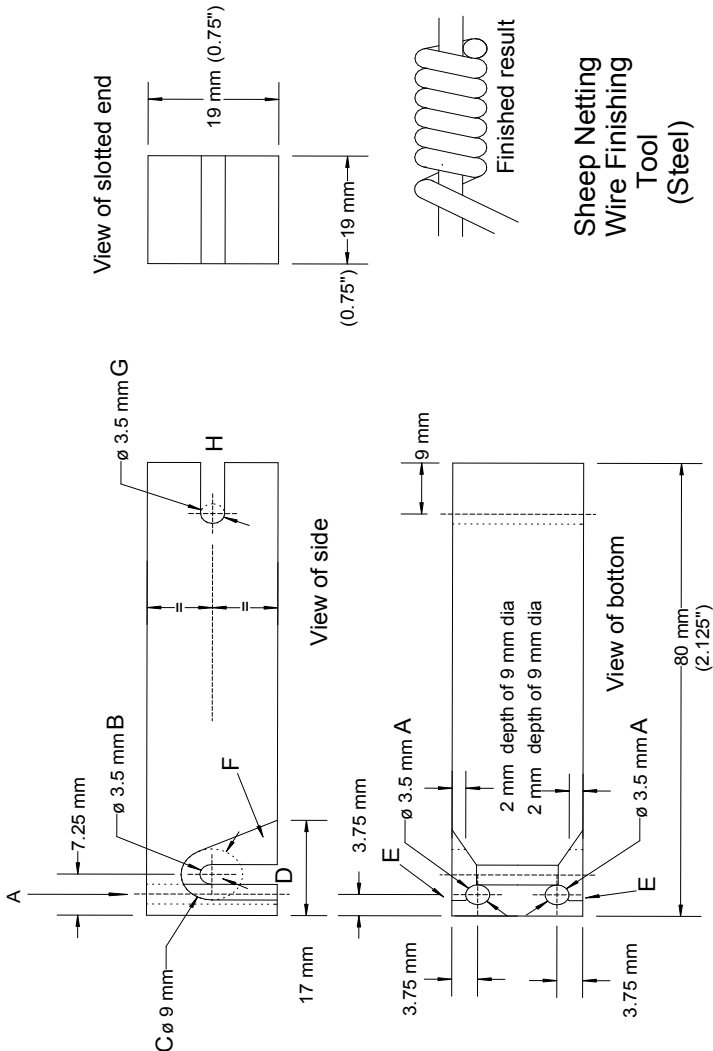
To make this tool it is best to proceed as follows. First drill the two 3.5 mm holes marked "A". These are as close as practical to the sides of the material. I suggest a remaining wall thickness of 2 mm. This dimension is partly responsible for the first turn of the twist not lying close to the turns that follow (see the diagram). Anything larger than 2 mm just means that the first turn of the twist is a little more difficult to achieve. The second hole "B" should be tangential to the holes "A". When drilling hole "B" clamp a spare piece of the square material alongside so that the 3.5 mm drill breaks into it. This starting hole can then be used to put a 9 mm drill through the spare material. You have then made a guide to assist putting the 9 mm recesses "C" in each side of the tool. Without the guide, the drill can be pulled towards the end of the tool when it breaks into the 3.5 mm holes "A". The 9 mm diameter should enter the sides by about 2 mm, the drill point goes deeper.

Slot "D" can then be cut. This allows the tool to be assembled on the fence wire. The "horns" "E" then need to be cut off. Chamfer "F" is to accommodate the first turn of the twist. This chamfer can be produced by filing but it is quicker using a 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " grinder, providing you are very careful.

To use the tool, start by putting the tail end of the wire across the already tightened working strand. Thread the tail end through the appropriate hole "A" and run it down the wire so the working strand enters slot "D". Put a slight bend in tail protruding from hole "A". This provides some resistance so that the first turns of the tool about hole "B" tightens up the tail. When there is no more slack in the tail end then the tail end wire runs through hole "A" and a neat twist is made round the working strand until the whole tail is used in the twist. To join two sections of netting, run ample tail ends parallel to one another, then turn one at right angles across the other. Grip the two parallel wires with your mole wrench and proceed to make a twist as described above. The turning action has to be resisted by the mole wrench. Reposition the mole wrench and turn the second tail across the first and make a second twist.

Reverting back making the tool, drill hole “G” as shown, and turn it into slot “H” as was done with “D”. The purpose of slot “H” is to enable you to recover lost tension in the fence. If you have to go round the bove of a tree, or perhaps have uneven ground, it is possible sometimes to have the netting tight at say the top, but the bottom remains slack. Sheep netting is made with kinks in the horizontal wires to give it some spring. Making these kinks more pronounced can eliminate any slack. So grip the tool at right angles in a mole wrench, put slot “H” over an existing kink and rotate the tool with the mole wrench. (By the way don’t staple fencing to trees!).

L E B Heyshead Farm 2009



Alpacas

I blame it all on the committee. "There's some interest in a course on alpaca management - see if you can arrange something" they said. I'd seen an advert for White Peak Alpacas in Mobberley, so with them being fairly local, Kevin and I visited one Saturday to make enquiries. How then did we come to leave after 2 hours having promised to buy 3 alpacas? It's funny how you can agree to something and yet have no recollection of it. A senior moment, I suppose.

Joanne and Adrian are a very friendly couple and extremely knowledgeable about alpacas having bred them for many years, originally in Derbyshire, hence the name. Joanne gave us a tour of the paddocks where they keep over 100 animals and the mill where they wash and card fleece. Throughout the tour we were given loads of information regarding housing, feeding, worming, foot trimming, behaviour, health, shearing and much more. During a welcome break in the kitchen of their lovely log cabin home (which includes an indoor swimming pool) I found myself trying to decide which of the 20+ colours I would like for my 3 boys. Boys because they are just for pets and girls are rather expensive and 3 for company as they hate to be alone.

Now that the shock of what I've done has passed I am looking forward to the arrival of them when they are fully weaned and being able to spin the fleece next year after shearing. Kevin has been busy checking all the fencing, removing poisonous plants and trees and building field shelters for them. We are now waiting like expectant parents. Hopefully there will be photos in the next "Gate".

P.s. I still haven't arranged a course

Margaret Nov 2009

Ducks and Vet Bills

A woman brought a very limp duck into a veterinary surgeon. As she laid her pet on the table, the vet pulled out his stethoscope and listened to the bird's chest. After a moment or two, the vet shook his head sadly and said, "I'm sorry, your duck, Cuddles, has passed away."

The distressed woman wailed, "Are you sure?" "Yes, I am sure. The duck is dead," replied the vet. "How can you be so sure?" she protested. "I mean you haven't done any testing on him or anything. He might just be in a coma or something."

The vet rolled his eyes, turned around and left the room. He returned a few minutes later with a black Labrador Retriever. As the duck's owner looked on in amazement, the dog stood on his hind legs, put his front paws on the examination table and sniffed the duck from top to bottom. He then looked up at the vet with sad eyes and shook his head.

The vet patted the dog on the head and took it out of the room. A few minutes later he returned with a cat. The cat jumped on the table and also delicately sniffed the bird from head to foot. The cat sat back on its haunches, shook its head, meowed softly and strolled out of the room.

The vet looked at the woman and said, "I'm sorry, but as I said, this is most definitely, 100% certifiably, a dead duck." The vet turned to his computer terminal, hit a few keys and produced a bill, which he handed to the woman. The duck's owner, still in shock, took the bill.

"£250?" she cried, "£250 just to tell me my duck is dead?"

The vet shrugged, "I'm sorry. If you had just taken my word for it, the bill would have been £20, but with the Lab Report and the Cat Scan, it's now £250."

Steve

Update to the Vet evening

For those who attended the vet evening with Tom Beech held at Gill Lawson's (Sheep) and Gillian and Gordon Murty's (Cattle). You may remember there was a discussion as to whether, or not, the cow in the crush was "in calf". Tom was not sure himself! Well not to worry because on the 29 June a heifer calf was born. Followed by another heifer and a bull calf on the 12th and 24th of July all doing well.

Unfortunately the last of our Shetlands to get in calf, and what was to be her first calf was another story. The birth was not straight forward and the vet was called out. Then despite all attempts to hand feed using bottles and tubes direct into the stomach he died. For some reason there was never that "spark of life" that the others had just naturally had about them, and he just faded over 3 days. Anyone who has been through a similar thing will know helplessness that makes you feel , but everyone with animals knows there are ups as well as downs.

The cows have been left to run with the same bull and are hopefully again back in calf, so we will just have to wait and see what next year brings!

Gillian Nov 2009

A Good Book

We had a good farmer friend in Thelwall who was in a co-operative and raised calves from weaning to the point where they could eat solids - he taught them to drink milk from a bucket. "I've got a problem", he said one day, "We are going on holiday and I planned to get rid of all the calves but the guy would not take two because they are sick. I've turned them out into a barn. Will you go and feed them a couple of times a day, please?" "When are you going?" we asked. "As soon as we finish packing the car!"

Early next morning, we made our first (and last) visit and found one calf very dead and the other standing next to it and not breathing well. We rang for the Hunt knacker van and took the survivor across the village back to our field where it stood unsteadily looking at the vast, unfamiliar expanse of a half-acre grassy field. It was a beautiful, small Swiss calf and, if it was going to do anything, still needed milk. We turned to a book we had used on several occasions when trying to coax ewes back to life. It contains 'old' remedies and it advised adding honey and crushed garlic to the milk to improve its palatability as well as add goodness. We took this foul-smelling liquid out to the calf which sniffed suspiciously and then started to drink. It loved it. A few days later, we ran out in alarm because we had heard an unfamiliar sound - the calf was calling for its milk. It was the first time it had made a sound. Several weeks and many cloves of garlic later, we took a much improved animal back to the farm. Alas, there is no happy ending because, in the confined conditions of the barns, the calf relapsed and was shot. Farmers don't have the time for a straggler whereas smallholders don't give up as easily.

We have great regard for that book. It does not replace the use of antibiotics and wormers but the older recipes have proved invaluable for our sheep (who still get ivy for Christmas dinner) and also for dogs especially those suffering skin conditions. We found our copy in a second hand bookshop and paid £7. 'Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable' by Juliette de Bairacli Levy, Faber and Faber, 1979.

Mike

Other Stuff

Gate

The next Gate will be produced in March. Please send me any articles, pictures, adverts etc for the next issue by the end of February 2010. (phone 07773780722 for email address).

Web Site

(www.cheshiresmallholders.org.uk)
If you have any articles or adverts for the web site let me know, pictures of your activities always welcome. I update the web site every few weeks so keep on looking at it for latest news.

Selected Charity / Xmas Presents

Our selected charity is Send A Cow which provides training, animals, trees and seeds for families in Africa in order to enable them to become self sufficient. Have a look at their web site www.sendacow.org.uk to see where they spend our contributions. Send some chickens or a beehive as an unusual present or if you are feeling generous send a cow.

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Membership List

Last year for the first time all members of the society were sent a list of members names, local area, telephone and e-mail. The idea being that on the day that all your sheep get out or the pig gives birth to more piglets than can be counted, getting in hay is a job that is more fun when shared. There could be someone near by able to lend a hand. Or if you just fancy a chat and a cup of tea or a pint down the pub or advice on the latest forms from our friends at DEFRA there could be someone near who has already worked out how to do it.

We have been told that several members had no idea that there were so many smallholders living near by and the list was very useful.

We will be sending out an updated list with the next Gate so if you do not want your details to be included please let me know either by email at Jane.Hulse@* or telephone 01829 781343. by the 1st January. If you contacted me last year to request that your name was not included I would be grateful if you could confirm that you still want your details deleted from the list

Jane * Changed by Editor to stop address being picked up by automated spambots for spam emailing finish Jane's email address with i7services.co.uk

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