

# OVER THE HEDGE

## Borders and North Shropshire Smallholders Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2011

**The Internet is a wonderful thing. . . There I was researching Brecon Buff geese as they are our most local rare breed and I fancied knowing a bit more about them. On my Google search up popped eggs for sale on Ebay, well I couldn't resist checking it out. I've heard a lot about this Ebay lark but never shopped myself. Next thing I found myself placing a bid, never dreaming I stood a chance.**

**Success! Well what a surprise! and what was even more of a surprise was the size of the four eggs when they arrived. For some stupid reason I'd expected them to be about double the size of an extra large chicken egg.**

**But I think my Plymouth Buff Rock Bantam broodies were the most surprised of all. Each is at present sitting well on two eggs and they are both doing a marvellous job. Boy are they in for even more of a surprise in a couple of weeks time !!!**

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### ■ AGM Report

April's AGM was fairly well attended and the following officers and committee members were elected:

|                      |   |                  |
|----------------------|---|------------------|
| Chairman             | - | Vince Morris     |
| Vice Chair           | - | Jackie Walker    |
| Treasurer            | - | Philip Wilkinson |
| Minutes Secretary    | - | Sue Foster       |
| Membership Secretary | - | Ann Wilkinson    |

#### Committee members:

Alan Baguley, Pam James, Peter James  
Rob Preston, Janet Shelton and Robert Shelton.

It was also unanimously decided that the constitution be adopted. Any member wishing to have a copy of the constitution please email [northshropsmallholder@gmail.com](mailto:northshropsmallholder@gmail.com) or see **Sue Foster**.

It was agreed that we should continue to publicise the group at a local level by word of mouth, members putting up posters, via email and the website and local newspapers etc free-ads. To increase local awareness it was also decided to investigate the possibility of having a stall at the Oswestry Food and Drink Festival in July and the Erddig Apple Festival in the autumn.

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### ■ Bread Making

In May we were lucky enough to have a talk on bread making by Sheila Sager, artisan bread maker. She owns the Shrewsbury Bakehouse which is a tiny little shop opposite the station in Shrewsbury and definitely worth a visit, but don't leave it until late in the day like we did because they may have sold just about everything!

Years ago Sheila came to England from America because of her husband's job. Enforced housewifery (is that a real word?) meant that she took up bread making and experimented on her children for years before opening the Bakehouse. There they make long-fermented bread - it uses only a tiny amount of yeast and takes two or three days to do its thing rather than the couple of hours recipes usually allow.

The result is an old-fashioned loaf with a lovely flavour and texture and a golden, nutty crust. Apparently, because the wheat ferments before you eat it rather than after, people who normally have trouble eating bread find this type more digestible - that's not a guarantee, but worth bearing in mind.

After we had been told about the methods and history of bread making and how we ended up with the plastic-wrapped white sliced, everyone was allowed to play with bits of dough to get an idea of how it should feel when properly kneaded. Then, once someone had been sent to a nearby pub for a sharp knife (I think Health & Safety only allow plastic knives in village halls!), we were each given a piece of three different breads to 'taste test'. The idea was for us all to taste them at the same time while Sheila talked us through their taste and texture . . . I don't think anyone managed to wait until it had all been handed out!

There is a possibility that Sheila and her staff may run some day courses on bread making and she has promised to let us know when they are up and running. There was definitely a lot of interest in them from the 40 people who were there - we'll let you know as soon as we have any details. By the way, I've had a go at making the bread (starting on Saturday and finishing on Monday - this needs a lot of forward planning!) and the result was very tasty - the only drawback is that, being so tasty, it just doesn't last very long!

Janet

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### ■ Trip to Fordhall Farm

One June evening about twenty members arrived at the farm car park and fended off the risk of thundery showers with trusty umbrellas. We met young Charlotte Hollins, manager of the Fordhall Community Land Initiative who led us around the farm trail. On the way Charlotte explained the history of the farm, the organic legacy of her father Arthur and the efforts she and brother Ben had faced to fight eviction.

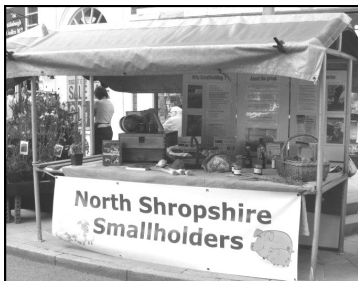
It was uplifting to see what had been achieved during the last five years; buildings repaired, hedges lain, orchards planted, outdoor classrooms created, raised vegetable beds added, and a farm shop and butchery kitted out. The farm's shareholders and volunteers must be justly proud of their achievements and ongoing efforts to engage the whole community in appreciating where food comes from.

We ended our evening at the Old Dairy renovated to create wonderful tea and meeting rooms where we enjoyed tea and cakes before wending our way homewards.

Pam

## ■ Oswestry Food Festival

The group attended the Oswestry Food Festival on Saturday 9th July to help drum up support and hopefully recruit new members. The weather was perfect and it was good to see Oswestry really buzzing with people and our stand was right on the Cross in front of Clarks shoes so it could not be missed.



Everyone who helped did a super job and the stand looked great with baskets of fruit and produce etc and even a beehive and some beekeeping equipment to stimulate interest.

So a big thank you to all those that helped set up and dismantle the stand, provided produce and items for display and of course everyone who volunteered their time during the day. I think we all enjoyed chatting to everyone that came by, handing out leaflets and promoting our activities.

Peter

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## ■ Autumn Programme

**August - Summer break - no meeting**

**Wed 28th September - Country Crafts**

A talk by **Howell Dodd** of **BTCV** ([www.btcv.org.uk](http://www.btcv.org.uk))

On country crafts in general and hedge-laying in particular (a practical follow-up session is planned for Jan or Feb 2012)

**Wed 26th October - Beekeeping for Beginners**

A talk by **Tony Gray** - MD from **Fragile Planet**, Oswestry  
All you want to know about starting your own bee hive.

**Wed 23rd November** - we hope to have a talk on Spinning and Weaving for all those that have excess fleeces to get rid of after shearing.

**Wed 14th December** Social Event - either a country wine tasting session (members will be welcome to bring along their homemade brews to sample as well) or a quiz night etc.

Rob, Vince and Peter met up recently to work out a calendar of events for 2012. Ideas for talks included: Dexter Cattle - Fungi - Ducks and Geese - Planning an Orchard - Quail, Guinea Fowl, Rhea etc. - Growing Veg on a Small Plot - Keeping Rabbits for Meat and Fur.

We also hope to introduce more trips, visits and practical events into the programme as an addition to the monthly meetings. If you have any particular topic you would like to see covered, suggestion for visits or have contacts with anyone qualified to give a talk, please talk to **Rob, Vince** and **Peter** or email us at: [northshropsmallholder@gmail.com](mailto:northshropsmallholder@gmail.com)

## ■ Recipe

### Rhubarb Vodka

Weigh enough chopped rhubarb to fill a kilner-type jar two thirds full. Add half that weight of white sugar and then fill the jar right up with vodka (cheap stuff is fine). Shake each day for the first few days until the sugar has dissolved. After six weeks strain and you will have a lovely pale pink drink which is delicious chilled and served over ice on a warm summer evening. By the way, it loses its rhubarby flavour after a few weeks, so don't hold back - enjoy it while the weather's warm. By the time that's gone it'll be time for . . . .

### . . . Blackcurrant Vodka

Just the same recipe and method, but probably a bit less sugar. You can just drink this as it is (without chilling and ice) - just like alcoholic Ribena! This keeps its flavour for longer than the rhubarb so it should see you through until your sloe gin is ready, which should last until it's rhubarb season again!

Janet

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## ■ Wanted, For Sale etc.

Wanted in Oswestry area - Grazing suitable for sheep, must be well fenced. Will consider anything between 1 and 10 Acres. If you think you can help please contact [manicmac@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:manicmac@tiscali.co.uk)

**Haylage** £18/roll.tn 01939 261205

**Pigmy Goat available for Stud** - "Ash" is a black and white pigmy goat available for stud. Stud fee is £50 - B&B is available if required at £7/week. Ring **01939 261205**

**Horse Manure** Free to good home, as much as you like. It grows excellent potatoes! Please email [northshropsmallholder@gmail.com](mailto:northshropsmallholder@gmail.com) for details.

**FREE** to good home - Three Jacob fleeces - email [northshropsmallholder@gmail.com](mailto:northshropsmallholder@gmail.com)

### Your experiences as a smallholder?

We want to make the newsletter as interesting as possible, so if you have any short articles, recipes, for sale or wanted ads, tips on smallholding or silly photos (with a few words of explanation) - please see Pam or email [northshropsmallholder@gmail.com](mailto:northshropsmallholder@gmail.com)

## ■ And Finally

Thirty days after our broodies began sitting on our goose eggs we were rewarded with the pipping and cracking of two eggs. We are now the proud owners of two simply gorgeous bundles of buffy-yellow fluff.