

The Knowle Farm Newsletter

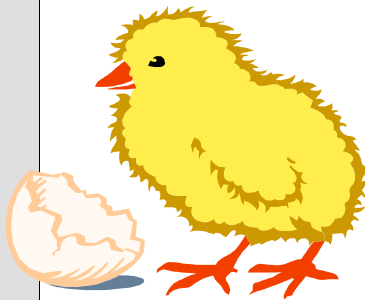
Christmas 1998

Here we are
again with
the old
newsletter.

Hope you
enjoy the
latest
stories,
and have
a
wonderful
Christmas
and New
Year.

Which came first the chicken or the egg??

We have had a productive year chicken-wise, but a not-too-good one egg-wise. As to which came first, however, we are none the wiser (although in our case of course, the chicken came first - the lovely Beryl).



Early in the year, Beryl's guinea fowl chicks flew the coop, and she looked very forlorn walking round the yard all by herself. I guess that being a chicken is not the world's most exciting occupation, and having to do it on your own must

be very trying. So, it was either some more chickens for company, or Prozac. We decided on the former, and bought a breeding triplet - two hens and a cockerel. Liz promptly named them Peggy & Pauline the pullets, and Colin the cockerel. Thus it came to pass that we had four chickens.

They were all very happy, but we have discovered the problem that everyone said we would have with free range chickens. You can't find the eggs! They lay them everywhere, and once there is a clutch they go broody and start to hatch them. By the end of lambing Peggy (or Pauline - they are interchangeable) had produced a modest brood of two chicks. It was extremely exciting, and we put them in the big coop. It quickly became apparent that this coop was too big for the little things - we needed a (much smaller) broody coop. Off we shot, to return with the required coop and four more

day old chicks to keep the other two company. Thus it came to pass that we had ten chickens.

Before we knew where we were, however, Pauline (or Peggy - anyway the other one) had also produced a brood. Colin had been very busy with his two concubines, but it was very obvious that he treated Beryl with the respect due to her superior years. Either that or she just wasn't having any! Either way, it came to pass that we fifteen chickens.

It became very difficult to keep track of every one, but the top shed with all the bales of hay and straw was a favourite place, and I used to stalk the hens to try and find their nests. We did find some of the nests and get a few eggs, but some escaped, and poor Beryl was caught trying to hatch two of the china eggs that we use to persuade the hens to lay. I couldn't find any

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Land Rover Bites Dust

You may remember that when we moved here and started to retire, we decided that we would have to sell one of the cars, and use Daisy the Land Rover as an emergency second car. That was the theory. In practice, while I was usually happy to drive Daisy to Ashbourne or wherever and take a little longer over it, Liz and Daisy never really got on. In fact, a rather more descriptive phrase would be 'a deep and abiding loathing'. Whenever Liz went out in it, something would go wrong. Always.

Like the time Liz got back from Duffield complaining that 'that ***** car won't go more than ten miles an hour'. I made the usual concerned husbandly enquiries. 'Did you have it in low ratio?'. What's that? was the reply. Well, I do have to admit that old Daisy has more than what would normally be regarded as her fair share of gear levers.

Four to be exact. Liz was working on the principle that if she didn't understand it, then it probably didn't matter. She had got the hang of the big wobbly one in the middle, but the other three were only small. I explained 'low ratio' several times, and four wheel drive, and free wheel hubs, but, if I am honest, I still don't think she has really mastered it, so I just started to make sure that it is left in 'Liz Compliant' mode when I park it.

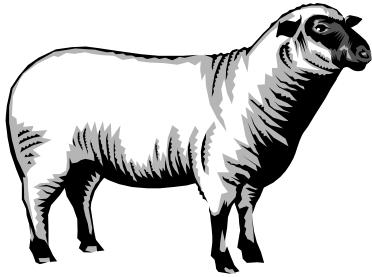
Or the time she got back from Ashbourne complaining that 'that ***** car won't go more than ten miles an hour'. I made the same concerned and husbandly enquiries - 'Did you have it in low ratio?'. No. 'Did you get out of second gear?'. Don't be stupid. Despite all my tactful, helpful, caring questioning the mystery of the slow Land Rover would have to remain just that - a mystery. Until I went to park it (Liz had been so hacked off that she had simply driven into the farm, stopped the engine and got out.) The choke was still out. Having put Daisy away, I returned to the kitchen and explained the mystery - 'You didn't push the choke back'. Choke? **CHOKES?**

They haven't made cars with **CHOKES** since Noah's ark failed it's MOT.

The next time Liz went to Ashbourne in 'that thing' was the day of the Ashbourne football match. (For those of you who don't know - once a year the good folk of Ashbourne hold what is laughing called the football match. It starts at 1 o'clock in the central car park, there are no discernible rules, the goal posts are about a mile apart at opposite ends of the village, all the shops board up their windows, all the law abiding citizenry retire behind locked doors, and over the rest of the afternoon the two gangs (teams in any normal game) rush around the town trying to get the only goal. The gang that get the goal win, the scorer gets to keep the ball, and most pubs in the area can boast at least one ball.)

Well, on the very day of this excitement, into town rides our heroine in Daisy. Daisy is duly parked in the main car park as Liz heads off to buy the two small items that she is here to get. On her return, horror of horrors, Daisy won't start. On our Daisy, the

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Lambing had too many wonderful and funny moments to recount in detail, but some things stick out:-

Like the day Terry tried to catch a ewe in order to put her in a separate pen. A ewe is a seventy kilo (11 stone), twitchy, fast moving lump who doesn't want to be caught, and once caught, only wants get away again. The trick is to work her into a corner then grab her. Or so they tell me. I finally got hold of this one, but she was much bigger and stronger than me, and Liz stood there laughing her head off while I was dragged all round the shed. I was *not* going to let her go, and the stuff which subsequently plastered my overall was eloquent testimony to my determination.

Then there was the first Saturday after the lambs had started to arrive. It was a lovely Spring day, and the world, his, dog, his family, most of his relatives, and a good proportion of his neighbours, turned up. Coincidentally it was also our tenant's daughter, Alice's, first birthday, and all her friends, friends' dogs etc. also turned up. At one point one poor ewe was giving birth before an audience of fifty plus! I don't *know* what an embarrassed ewe looks like, but I think I now have a good idea.

There are in this world those who do not see the attraction of getting covered in straw, and 'other things'. We noted the look of distaste on the face of one member of the family, as he walked in his pristine wellies on his one trip up the yard.

Others, however, had a wonderful time covering themselves with that which one could be expected to cover oneself, walking through every mucky place to be found, and generally acting one's shoe size. The gentleman in the previous paragraph was horrified to discover that one of those from the previous sentence was actually planning to go home in the car with him!!!. Of that journey home the entire family remains strangely silent.

One of the snags with being a farmer is straw. It gets everywhere. I thought I had reached a low point when found straw in my underwear, but no. During this period I

Lambing

had to stay in a smart London hotel overnight, (we did manage to squeeze in the odd day for the software business during lambing - though not many) and as I undressed for bed, a bale and a half of straw fell out my knickers and covered the floor. What could I do? I left my *Farmer's Guardian* on the bed and hoped that the chambermaid understood.

Liz loved the lambs, and as Andy regards bottle feeding the halt, the sick and the lame as, at best, a necessary evil, Liz found her role. Her first was named Henry, and, after a great deal of TLC, (tender Liz's care) a splendid little chap he grew up to be, one of Liz's success stories. Until we had lunch in the Lake District in October, and there, on the menu, was 'Braised Lamb Henry'. We had it, but told the waiter we had decided to call it 'Lamb Humphrey'.

Naming the lambs became a game, in which Andy joined, although it seemed that he had not done this before. We had one who seemed to drink an awful lot, and pass wind a great deal, so we called him Norman. (Those of you who know Norman will understand, those who don't should substitute the name of an appropriate friend!).

Because some of the ewes refuse or don't have enough milk to feed their lambs, some ewes die, and some lambs are sickly, we set up an orphanage, with an automatic feeder. Some of the real characters grew up here, like Little Louie. He was tiny, spent all day chewing reflectively on his cud, and was a very independent, philosophical little lamb. As the rest of the lambs grew and started to play lamb games like 'lets run from one end of the pen to the other, and back again', Little Louie stood in the middle looking bewildered and getting trampled on. 'Er - which we are we going again?' He appeared very phlegmatic about it, however. Unhappily for us (but happily for him) he doesn't seem to put on much weight, so he is likely to be with us for some time.

The orphanage was rather sad, however, as, of course, the poorly ones were the most likely to die. And they did. We lost about half, which upset Liz greatly, but the trick seems to be to enjoy the ones who live. We had to call the Vet in on one occasion, and when she had finished

An Invitation

We have increased our flock to 220 ewes, and bought three more tups (rams) who's names are best left unmentioned. So, with Andy's flock, we expect to be lambing 550 ewes this year. That's about 1000 lambs. That's about 40 lambs per day on average. Which means up to 80 lambs on heavy days. We are anticipating a frantic lambing, but we would both love friends and relatives to come and see us at this magic time - late March and early April. Bring your own wellies, (although we have several spare pairs), a change of clothing in case, and be prepared to get stuck in!!

sorting out the patient, we sat in the kitchen with a cuppa while she gave Andy and me a full description of the problem. When it came to further treatment, we pointed out that Liz was in charge of post natal care, and would she explain to her. When Liz arrived, the vet started her remarks with "I have told your son all about it...." - meaning Andy. Neither Andy nor I noticed this, but Liz was furious. (I was only 15 when he was born!! - L) When I told Andy, he said he would try calling Liz 'Mum', but I suggested that he be out of plate throwing range when he did so. He did in fact do it once, but strangely, only the once!

The latest position is that we have currently sold eight lambs at good prices (thanks to Andy),

Chickens

(Continued from page 1)

easy way to break it to her, and she went all hormonal on us for a week or so. Gave us a real good clucking to!

One evening Colin didn't come home to the roost. Liz was concerned, but hey, this is a cockerel we are talking about here. So he has a night out on the town. No big deal. Just like a female to worry. The next day we could hear him in the back field so I was obviously right, and he was back and telling all his mates about it over a beer or two. Its a guy thing. By mid afternoon, however, he still had not actually appeared, and further investigation revealed that he was not, in fact, in the back field. Andy & I surmised that he was on the top of all the hay in the barn, and I climbed up to get a look. No Colin to be seen. But as I got to the back of the shed, Colin seemed to move to the front, and as I moved towards the front he moved to the back. We finally realised that he was stuck in the middle of the stack of big round bales of hay. Andy was very forbearing as

he carefully dismantled the hay stack until, eventually, Colin stalked out, metaphorically straightening his tie and brushing fluff off his sleeve. He gave us an 'I am not used to being kept waiting' look and stalked off. We rebuilt the hay stack and then rushed out as we heard a great commotion in the yard. Colin, having been trapped for probably 24 hours was feeling his oats, and chasing Beryl, who was clucking blue murder, and just managing to stay out of range. It lasted about 5 minutes before he got the message, but it was really funny.

The final brood of the year came in September when we discovered Peggy (or Pauline.....) sitting on ten eggs. She hatched them all and was doing very well with them when we went away to the Lake District. When we got back, our neighbour, Julia, had a real tale of disaster to tell. Peggy (or Pauline.....) had decided that the road would be a good place to scratch for food. Bad idea. Poor Julia had to deal with one dead mum, one dead chick, and one dying chick. I get a feeling that we still haven't heard the entire story, but she had dug holes and given them all good respectable burials.

Another two chicks then died as well, but the remaining five are still with us. Thus it came to pass that we had twenty chickens.

So, we now have twenty chickens, and still NO FLIPPING EGGS. However, two or three of the cockerels are about ready to eat, and this raises other spectres. Liz's defence technique in this situation is to give them all cuddly names like Malcolm or Roger, and then get so attached to them that it is impossible to do anything but let them die of old age while eating our food, and not laying eggs. But I was too smart for her, I named the three of them Pot, Freezer, and Au Vin. And so they have stayed, and so, by the time you get this they may well be Ex-Pot, Ex-Freezer, and Ex-Au Vin.

So a good year on the chicken front, not quite such a good year on the egg front, and we will report on Sunday lunch in due course.

Barn Dance in Barn

A number of friends from Northumberland wanted to come down and camp with us for August bank holiday. We thought this a splendid idea, and decided, by way of a celebration, to have a barn dance. After all, we have the barn. Our tenants Russell & Julia also wanted to join in, so the invitations were sent out, a band was located after many hours of hard work by Liz, and an audition in a pub in Birmingham where, I was convinced, I would say goodbye to the car's wheels.

I spent hours with pressure washer, shovel, bobcat, and broom cleaning the barn of all its muck. It positively sparkled. Andy organised straw bales to sit on, and a barrel sawn in half for a barbecue. Liz and Julia organised food and cooking type help while Russell was responsible for about fifteen gallons of cider!

On the big day, all the Northumbrians arrived, pitched their tents, and got stuck in. By the time we had finished, there was a farm trailer stage for the band, another (cleanish) one for the drink, a super barbecue, with loads of charcoal, and the whole place was decorated with miles of bunting. It looked a real treat, and the only worry was how many people would arrive.

In the end, we lost count of how many people came, but it was loads. Lots of friend, lots of children, everyone brought their own food and drink, and one wonderful party even brought the full picnic hamper, table and chairs. The band and caller were marvellous, and a great time was had by all.

Some nameless cousin who (on the plus side) got up early and did most of the cleaning up, also (on the minus side) let the chickens out, and our vociferous cockerels proceeded to wake the entire

camp site at about 7 in the morning with their cock-a-doodle-doing. One guest, on arriving in the kitchen later and being asked if he wanted some coffee, replied that he wasn't sure. It had all been too much.

My three favourite memories of the night were Liz in the big, white, tasselled cowgirl dress we bought when we were in Dallas, young boys filling up their Coke cans from the cider barrels, and a teenage nephew who, having had a bottle or two of beer too many the night before, arrived down in the kitchen in the late morning complaining 'I was poorly in the night - it must have been one of those sausages'. I suppose no generation ever realises that their parents really were their age once!!

Hedge cuts Man

I borrowed Andy's tractor for the weekend, fitted the hedgecutter, and set off. "Start at the back of the farm where it won't notice" they said. I have to admit that with three levers on the cutter, a tractor with which I was not familiar, and absolutely no idea of what I was doing, it sounded good advice. I soon got the hang of it however, and, apart from the odd bit where the hedge is now sculptured when I lowered the cutter instead of raising it, I did a fairly good job (though I say so myself as shouldn't). Andy arrived about midday, (by which time I had done one field, and most of a second), expecting me to have cut about 25 yards! (He obviously had no idea of the calibre of the person with whom he was dealing! - ed.) I got the whole place done in the weekend. Not bad for a beginner!! (He omits to tell you of the time he tidied up under the hedges with the lawn tractor and punctured three of the tyres on hawthorns!!- L)

Daisy (Continued from page 1) normal mechanical engine fan has been replaced by an electric one, which Liz knew she had to switch on. What she did not think about was switching it off again. And the fan had been running for about an hour. And the battery was flat.

By now the time was about 12:30, half an hour before the match starts, and as she stood there looking a little concerned, a kind man on a bike offered to have a look at it for her. He confirmed that the battery was flat - what she needed was some jump leads. She dashed back into town, bought the required jump leads, and rushed back to the car. By this time it was about 12:45, and things were hotting up. She accosted a passing Volvo driver (on the basis that all Volvo drivers are wonderful, nice, kind, caring 90s sort of people) and he said of course he would help her jump start it. Unfortunately, when the cyclist gentleman had slammed the bonnet shut, he had broken the catch, and it would now no longer open.

This was now beginning to get seriously worrying. About five minutes to go, Daisy the only vehicle left in the car park, and no way to jump start her. (In case it hasn't been made clear, any car left in the car park at the start of the match is likely to get wrecked - not that that would have

bothered Liz overmuch at this point!)

Parked at the side of the car park is a food trailer, and the owner has a Range Rover - did he know anything about Land Rovers. Not a lot apparently, except that he didn't like them - a view with which Liz was agreeing more as each minute passed. He could, however, tow start it if she had a tow rope, which we do. You never go out in Daisy without a tow rope.

Did Liz know how to bump start a car? Certainly. How dare he. With minutes to spare, they hitched up and started to drive round the car park, but still Daisy wouldn't start. It took Liz two complete circuits to realise that she hadn't turned the ignition on. As soon as she did that, old Daisy fired away, and she left the car park with a red face and seconds to spare.

It was not a happy Elizabeth who returned home that lunch time, and I have to say, I feel that I can date the 'Liz needs a new car' campaign going into overdrive from about this time. The long and the short of it is that Liz now has a little red Mazda MX5 convertible, and she and Daisy now no longer speak.

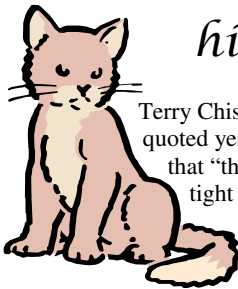
Bobcat Driver Learns Lesson



From our mucking out correspondent.

When t' time came to muck out t' cows, Terry had a new toy, the bobcat (mini digger to you non-farming folk), with which to do it. Already an experienced JCB operator, he knew all about shovelling muck. What he hadn't realised is that, whereas the JCB bucket, when raised, maintains much the same position (due to the parallelogram nature of the lift mechanism), the bobcat does not. As you raise the bucket, it tips backwards. For reasons which need not concern you, dear reader, the particular muck in question was runny, some might even say liquid, and as he raised the first load overhead watched by Andy and Liz, Andy said to Liz "Shall we tell him the bucket tips backwards?". "No" said Liz.....

Redundancies hit farm



Terry Chisman (55) was quoted yesterday as saying that "things were getting tight down on the farm, and everyone had to pull his weight". He particularly mentioned the RCOs, which readers may remember are Rodent Control Operatives - aka cats. He went on to say that while part of the team appeared to be getting on with the job, and developing his career opportunities with in-job-training, the other was in danger of redundancy. Another spokesperson for the company (46) said that redundancy was not on the cards, but certain members of staff appeared better suited to other careers, and there is the likelihood of at least one sideways move to CS1 (Child Substitute One). It is understood that at least one written warning has been issued.

Idiot Breaks Tractor

The big day arrived. Today we spread poo mountain. I had been looking forward to this day for weeks! We had hired two real men with serious muck spreaders to do the actual work, and I was going to sort of 'fill in the corners' where the big boys couldn't get, using Andy's tractor and spreader.

The first field I drove into had a tree by the gate, which I drove under. Unfortunately, it caught the exhaust pipe and bent it, but I wasn't that bothered, Andy had done the same thing to my digger the week before and the score seemed to be fifteen all, exhaust pipe wise.

Unhappily, this was not the case as Andy's tractor has a turbo, and the actual exhaust manifold had broken. (For the less technical among our readers, this is a big, expensive, difficult to get hold of, difficult to fit, can't get the old one off anyway, available only from the manufacturers, piece of metal.) To cut a very long story short, I spent the rest of the day in my car

101 things to do with Baling Twine

Since being allowed to carry his own baling twine, Terry has found it a panacea for all ills. For example, our very expensive, but prone to leaking, shower suffered a setback. It was being it's usual idiosyncratic self, and Liz was trying to encourage it to work at full speed. She was, however, a bit too generous with her knob twiddling, and it broke. Riding to the rescue, Terry got it going again by wrapping baling twine around the bit that operates the pump and it now works fine with the other end attached to one's big

charging up and down the M6 trying to replace it. (Leaving a farmer without his tractor is not an option!) I spread no muck that day, and drove several hundred miles instead, but learned a lesson. Tractors and trees can be an expensive mixture.