

The Knowle Farm Newsletter

Christmas 1999



*Here we are
with 1999's
newsletter.*

*Hope you find
something to
bring a smile to
your lips.*

*Have a
wonderful
Christmas and
let's hope the
millennium bug*

Our neighbours, (amazingly tolerant people given the circumstances in which they currently find themselves living - i.e. next door to us), live in a beautiful house, with all the walls painted a brilliant white, right next to one of our fields. Well. One of my early attempts at muck spreading involved the said field. I cruised up to the house with the spreader hurling muck and defiance in all directions, but was just a

Lambing was even busier this year than last, but was marred by enzootic abortion in our ewes, which caused the loss of a few lambs. We still lambed 550 ewes on the farm, and produced about 1000 lambs though, and

Palace Coup Foiled

It was 6 o'clock on a dark cold morning in late March. Early morning tea was being drunk in the lambing sheds to the occasional grunt that passes for conversation at times like these. Then, in walks Colin our head cockerel. He was not a happy sight. Blood everywhere. His comb battered, cut and bleeding. And walking in the sort of way that you do too early in the morning after too many beers on too late a night the night before. He had been in a fight.

White House Attacked

leeeeee bit slow turning it off. They were very happy to get the garden mucked for free, but the odd black blob that found it's way on to the paintwork was less welcome. They do still talk to us however.

Lambing Highlights.

that's a lot of noise. One or two memories stand out:-

We were getting short of buckets so Liz was dispatched to Do It All to get some cheap ones. She arrived back looking very pleased with herself, and announced that she had bought a dozen at a pound each. But there was a sting in the tail. They were pink. PINK. Andy was aghast. Never in all his experience had a farmer been seen with a *pink bucket*. He made sure that his ewes always had proper black ones, and was very careful never to be seen carrying one. So careful in fact that his brother, Graham,

offered me £10 for a photo of Andy with one in each hand. I never got it.

While lambing was at it's most frantic, Liz had a phone call from someone at Cell Net trying to get hold of me to sell me some "customer benefits". She explained that we were in the middle of lambing, which means several weeks of 12 to 14 hour days, but he was obviously a city dweller, as his response was "Well, I could always call on a Saturday".

We had one little lamb who was thick. Thick for a lamb this is.

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And lost. He had to have lost, because if he was the winner, the other one had to have been dead, and the others were all present and correct.

He staggered the length of the lambing shed, crawled under Andy's caravan, lowered his beak gently to the floor, and rested. For the remainder of the morning. We thought he was going to die.

We had a number of young cockerels coming to maturity and one of them had ousted Colin from his harem. You may remember Pot, Freezer and Au Vin mentioned in last year's Newsletter, and we had added another since then - Cocky.

We felt that we could probably live with this - it is after all the natural way of things - but Colin decided otherwise. No longer locked in at night, he was free to wander the farm, and start crowing at 4 o'clock in the morning. And, given forty acres of farm from which to pick,

where do you think the best possible place for early morning crowing was? Right! Just outside our bedroom window.

After a couple of mornings of this we decided that it was time to send in the U.N. (United Neighbours). In an early morning surprise attack, Cocky, the rebel leader, was trapped, and he and his cohorts were eliminated. Colin once again ruled the roost. Peace reigned, and all was well with the world.

There is a sad P.S. to this story. Liz and I had been out all day, and as we turned back into the drive, there was Colin lying dead beside the road. He had been hit by a car. The road is never a good place for chickens, but free range means free range. We will miss him, but, on the plus side, it will stop our chickens breeding, and producing chickens that are really too small to eat.

A Bad Year

In many ways, 1999 was not a good year - starting with the death of my beloved Dad in March. He had been ill for a very long time, having had a stroke in 1996 and also suffering from diabetes and

prostate cancer, but had fought it all gallantly. During January, February and early March, however, he just went downhill and he died on the 16th, just as we started lambing in earnest - Terry & Andy had to cope without any support from me. Dad's Thanksgiving Service was wonderful and Four Oaks

Methodist Church was packed to bursting. Dad would have been so pleased with all the marvelous tributes paid to him. We were also saddened by the death of Dad's sister in law, Edna, in September especially as we were away on the Broads & not able to attend her funeral.

Lambing (Continued from page 1)

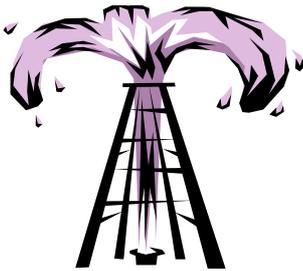
Seriously thick. But also very small. Too small to be big enough for two short planks. So he got called "plank". His favourite trick was to escape from his pen leaving behind, mum, warmth, milk, security and comfort, only to blaat like mad when he couldn't find his way home.

There was Columbus who, at the drop of a warm milk bottle, would wander to the farthest reaches of the lambing shed amongst the hundreds of pregnant ewes, where he got trampled.

Two friends were here when we needed to turn some of the new mums and lambs out of the sheds and back into the fields. This looks a very simple job, so we let them (and their two young daughters) try it. Within minutes, the family had formed a small group while the sheep galloped round them, for all the world like Indians attacking a wagon train in the "How the west was won" movies

I had forgotten, but the period immediately following lambing is marked by the large number of perfect strangers who knock at the door saying "There are some sheep out on the road".....

Oil Crisis Hits Farm Worker.



washing machine. We ran the washing machine empty two or three times a day for the best part of a week, but still it stank.

Eventually I stopped smelling, the shower stopped smelling, and so did the washing machine, but the shoes and the waxed jacket had to go.

With the advent of all the diesel powered equipment now present on the farm, I bought a tank for red (no tax) diesel at an auction, and filled it up - at 9.5p per litre - cheap huh?

When the time came to order some more oil for the central heating, I ordered some more red diesel at the same time (they come from the same supplier). Now those of you with a mathematical bent will appreciate that, if the tank is a one metre cube, it will hold exactly 1000 litres. It follows that, if a dip stick shows it to be only 20% full, it will take up to an additional 800 litres. Being the cautious sort of chap that I am, I ordered only 700 litres to give a healthy margin of error.

When the tanker arrived, I held the nozzle in the tank while the driver turned on all the pumps and stuff. All went well, until we got to about 376 litres, when the tank filled up and I got showered in the smelly stuff at the rate of about 100 gallons a minute.

I showered, I washed, I showered again, I bathed, but to no avail. I stank. I put the clothes through the washing machine, and the clothes still stank. But now so did the

I still don't quite understand how it happened - clearly either I dipped the tank incorrectly or the fairies filled it up after I had dipped it - but we now think this is where the stuff got its name. Should it happen again we both agree that, having got the clothes off, we will cry in unison "diesel have to go".

There is a P.S. to this story too - in November the people in the cottage reported that their boiler had gone out - they were out of oil. We ordered some more and when it was delivered, I stood guard over the tank as the oil pumped in. This time, however, I was more wary - once covered, twice shy. It was obvious that we were not going to get the full delivery in, so I turned it down, and agreed with the delivery man that we would only take 900 litres. Unfortunately - at 895 litres, the tank overflowed. Because I was not in old clothes, we did not throw them all out so I still smell of heating oil, and for those of you with an interest in these things, heating oil is even worse to get rid of than red diesel!!

Farming Fashion Statements

At the start of the year I decided that the little old Ford tractor that I had bought when we first got here was not up to the job that I was now trying to do. A bigger, more powerful, one with four wheel drive was required.

As it happened, Andy wanted to swap his at the same time, so I agreed to buy his old one from him, and at the same time, swap my old Ford for my very own muck spreader at a local dealer. Andy spent a considerable time cleaning the tractor up, and the dealer delivered both Andy's new tractor, and my spreader to Andy's farm. Andy then drove my new outfit down here. What a splendid sight it was. Sparkly red tractor, with matching sparkly red muck spreader.

That's how us farmers make fashion statements. No Land Rover Discovery with mountain bikes on the back for us - no sir - you just can't compete with a man with a matching tractor and muck spreader. Needless to say, however, that after a busy summer they are now a matching shade of brown, with lumps!

Show of the year

Muck 99 - yes there really is a show called that, and by combined errors of timing and judgement, I missed it!

Quotes of the year

Andy during lambing - "Terry falls asleep if he just stands still for too long"

Jon while installing the new kitchen - "Terry - why don't you go and make the tea."

Andy to Jon as Andy and I go out to do sheep things - "You can pay me later for taking him

Tractor Stuck (again) or The Missing Photos

Early in the year (when the tractor was still Andy's - see *Farming Fashion Statements* on [page 2](#)) I was starting to cut the hedges, and the tractor slipped into the ditch. All by itself, you understand - it had nothing to do with me!! Anyway there I was with the right hand side of the tractor in the ditch, and the (very heavy) hedgecutter hanging over the hedge. What to do? This is where Liz learns how to drive the tractor I thought - get it all hooked up and tow it out before anyone finds out.

I introduced Liz to this idea, and was surprised to find it received with less enthusiasm than I had expected. However, Liz is a realist and accepted that she was a bit short in the options department. We got my tractor out, halfway across the field and who should roll up? Andy of course. (It seems he is attracted to boiling kettles, cooling beer, stuck tractors, and anything else I might be

breaking at the time - see *Mature Reflections* on [page 4](#)). There was nowhere to hide.

Andy looked at the situation, drew a long slow breath, shook his head slowly, and offered the opinion that the tractor was well stuck. Not the news I wanted to hear. Liz by this time, with wifely care and attention to her husbands poor delicate masculine ego, had dashed in for the camera.

Unfortunately, by the time she had got it, Andy and I had hooked up the towrope and with a little huffing and puffing pulled the tractor clear - no big deal really - but that is why the interesting photos are missing.

I have always wanted to return to the Norfolk Broads with Liz. I have many happy memories from my youth, and when it turned out that my cousins from Essex are also keen Broads fans,

we decided to go in a foursome. (Two boats though - you can't be too careful even with relatives!).

Liz's showing with boats so far was not too promising. We once



hired an enormous yacht for the day with our friends

Lynn and Colin, (who are *real* sailors) and Liz was fine until the mast started to lean. By lean she meant two degrees from the vertical - after that the knuckles went white, the face grew taught, and conversation was reduced to grunts. As you can imagine this makes it difficult to sail a yacht, and Colin, as skipper, had to suffer the indignity of being passed by all and sundry.

Her second experience was with my Mirror dinghy - we got nearly five yards from the shore before the knuckles went white etc, etc, and we immediately had

Liz goes boating, Terry goes swimming.

boat tied up to the quay, and we started to load the gear aboard. "Jump on" I said. Wrong. The three inch gap with two stout ropes each side was too much for Liz, she needed helping. From there, though, it did get better, and by the end of the week she was, while not quite leaping on and off, managing the change from ship to shore with a degree of confidence.

to turn round and abandon the trip.

In view of this we decided that a cruiser (*gin palace* is the more disdainful term used by those who sail yachts) would be more suitable than a sailing boat.

We arrived at the boatyard and found a lovely 30 foot

Probably the highlight of the week was the day at Oulton broad. I had towed my Mirror dinghy all the way to Norfolk in order to sail it, but because I only sail it about once every blue moon it took some time, a good deal of help from my friends, and frequent reference to the "How to Sail Your Mirror Dinghy" book even to get it rigged.

Eventually though I was ready. I was aware that the wind was fairly strong, and had it been a great deal stronger I would not have been able to sail at all given my level of incompetence. Anyway into the teeth of this gale, I set sail. Mostly all was well, and I managed to correct a few knots left untied, and a few sheets (ropes to you and me) left untightened, and was doing quite well. Until my third pass

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Mature Reflections

As the millennium approaches, I have been reflecting on the new knowledge, skills, abilities and friendships that have been bestowed upon me over the last few years in this, the beginning of the autumn of my life.

It was humbling (although not very, as you can imagine, in my case) to come to the conclusion that I have only one real natural, God given, talent in my chosen agricultural lifestyle - breaking things. During this past twelve months I have:-

Broken guttering with the big digger, the bobcat, and the fence post knocker.

Broken the yard scraper as I drove the digger over it.

Broken the bobcat muck grab hydraulics pretty well once a month.

Bent sheep hurdles with the bobcat.

Knocked out the front of car garage shed with the digger.

Broken a window in my new tractor.

Broken fencing with the rotavator on the tractor.

I am getting better however (in the sense that I am breaking less!!). When I was rotavating, I broke almost nothing, and when I cut the hedges this year, I had a completely clear round.

One thing conspicuous by its absence from the above list is Andy's new pick up. If I get anywhere near it, in anything bigger than a pair of wellington boots, he starts looking worried, and hopping agitatedly from one foot to the other. Unfortunately, this makes me nervous.....

Boating (Continued from page 3) across the Broad. The wind blew, the dinghy leaned over, I let go the main sheet to let the mainsail out, but the boat went over, and I went in.

At this point several things happened at once. The first was that Liz started rushing around on the shore shouting "He's in, he's in". At about the same time I started deeply to regret not having read the book on the subject of righting a capsized dinghy. And the third was that David (the cousin we were with) leaped aboard his cruiser and started to rush to my aid. Unfortunately, he forgot to cast off (untie) his boat from ours, which was in turn still tied to the jetty. There was much noise, much thrashing, and much foam, but very little action.

All's well that ends well however - the dinghy was righted, and I was fished out and returned to the arms of my beloved with no more than

superficial damage to the pride. It had been an exciting day, and by way of celebration, as we walked down for a well earned pint or two, David and I bought the two water pistols that provided us (and many passers by) with several hours of fun during the rest of our voyage. All in all it was a great week, and one that we intend to repeat. All four of us are already booked again for next year.

New Timescales Introduced.

This year we have really started our retirement in earnest, and we now work on software for only about three days a month. As so many people have before us, we are left wondering how on earth we ever found time to work full time, but our lives are a great deal less stressful, and we are loving every minute of it.

Our customers in the software business are slowly realising that we really have to started to retire, but there is one who still has problems. Liz was quoting for some work, and told the customer that it would take three days. As the day in question was a Tuesday, the customer said that he would expect the work on Friday.

"No", said Liz, "This is Terry we are talking about, when he says three days, he means three rainy days"

101 more things to do with baling twine

Tie loops of baling twine in the handles of your kitchen utensils to hook them to the rack.

Show those sailors a thing or two by tying the fenders to your Mirror dinghy with it

Daisy revisited.

You may recall one of last years big stories involved the falling out of Liz and Daisy our trusty old Land Rover. I thought you might like to know that Daisy is now enjoying a well earned retirement with the occasional quiet trip round the farm to check, or maybe to round up, the sheep. It is a gentle, tranquil life, with no more of the sort of undignified dashing around that

Liz expected. Her (Daisy that is, not Liz), MOT is due again and the odometer still reads the same as it did last year - and the year before - and the year before that. In fact I am reminded of the words of the immortal Bard concerning the Seven Ages of the Land Rover -

*Last scene of all,
That ends this strange
eventful history,
Is second childishness
and mere oblivion,
Sans heater, sans
petrol gauge, sans speedo, sans*

