

SMALL FARM TRAINING GROUP

December 2021 Newsletter

This month's newsletter includes:

- 1000 years of traditional farming - Part 4
 - Jobs for the Month
- Bacon curing and sausage making with Andrew Lake
 - Time to take my rams out



December 2021

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Letter from the Chair

By Zoe Chinman

Merry Christmas One and All

Huge thank you to all of those members who ventured out to the AGM in November and thank you to all of those who voted me in as Chairman for the second year, along with our lovely new committee, (remaining largely unchanged, with the exception of Catriona Bush who has joined as Admin Support).

Whilst it was really lovely to see so many members in one place, what really stood out for me was the interaction between members, the sharing of knowledge, making new friends and contacts, and bartering for goods and services. There was a really fantastic community atmosphere on the night, (possibly helped by some wine?) and I'm excited to be helping the group continue to develop in these areas, it really does bring benefits to us all and makes the group feel something very special to be part of. We are already at the planning stages for 3 big group wide events next year, The Spring or Summer BBQ, The Harvest Picnic, and of course the AGM, so watch this space.....

As we go into 2022, our events are already looking quite exciting, I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Free Friday

What events are coming up..

JANUARY 2022

15th January - Stock Fencing

21st January - Free Talk:
Keeping Rheas

23rd January - Dehydrating
for Beginners

29th January - Willow
Workshop

FEBRUARY 2022

19th February - Hedge
Laying Workshop

22nd February - Free Talk:
Getting Ready for Lambing

27th February - Beginners
Pressure and Water Bath
Canning Workshop

night meeting on the 21st January, and there is already a small programme of workshops, courses, and events available to book online. We do add to this list frequently, so please keep checking to see what takes your fancy. If there is something you would like to learn, let us know, or if you are able to offer yourself as an "enthusiastic amateur" and share your knowledge with fellow members, I'd love to hear from you, whilst it may seem a little daunting, we will support you all the way. Everyone starts out as a beginner and we can only learn if we have those around us willingly to teach, so we really do appreciate your help.

On behalf of myself and the committee, all that remains is for me to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Healthy, Happy New Year 2022 - let make it the groups best ever!

Zoe x



1. April's illustration from the Julius Work Calendar (Eleventh Century AD)

1000 years of traditional farming

Part 4 - April

By Paul Lovatt-Smith

April's illustration from the calendar takes us on a break from the hard work of farming tasks. Again, I have to take issue with the British Library's description of the scene which is "Feasting". I have never heard of a feast without food and if you look closely, there is no food being consumed in this picture. Four of the six people are however holding drinking vessels, in which case "Drinking" would be a more accurate description. But I think this would be unfair on the artist. April is the usual month for the festival of Easter which I understand was, during these times, the most important religious event of the year. So, the artist, who was surely part of the Christian community in Canterbury and probably a monk, would have wanted to portray the spiritual, as well as the physical joys of the occasion. In my view "Easter Celebrations" would be a good description.

The scene has more of a formal feel than others in the calendar. The main participants are the three men in long robes, seated on an

MARCH 2022

6th March - Tidy that Garden

13th March - Mushroom Log Making Afternoon

18th March - Free Talk: Practical Fluid Therapy for Sheep & Goats

26th March - An Introduction to Smallholding

APRIL 2022

2nd April - Practical Lambing

15th April Free Talk: Deer Management & Control

23rd April - Kitchen Gardening

MAY 2022

20th May - Free Talk: Finding Treasures on Your Land

28th May - Heathfield Show

JUNE 2022

10th June - 12th June: South of England Show

SEPTEMBER 2022

15th September - SFTG Social Cuppa at the Dolphin Sheep Fair

25th September - Dehydrating for Beginners

If there is a course you would like to do but haven't seen listed, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Get Social

Don't forget that we're also on Facebook and Instagram...why not follow us and see what we're up to!

Insta:

@small_farm_training_group

Facebook:

Small Farm Training Group

ornate bench decorated with beasts (a lion and a gryphon?). These men are flanked by three men in short tunics who are in attendance. On the right standing guard is a soldier with a shield and long spear. On the left, a man is pouring drink into a horn. To one side of the bench stands a young man, who appears to be speaking (or singing?), signified by his open mouth and pointing finger, to the three men on the bench. Perhaps he is re-telling the Easter story or singing a hymn.

What were they drinking? From brief online research there are a huge variety of options. The poorer people made mead from honey, ale from barley and hops and cider from apples. The richer people would have been able to afford wine, either imported or locally grown (there are over 40 vineyards mentioned in the Domesday Book, although according to Wikipedia, wine was used mainly for holy communion). On top of this there were spirits such as gin.

Perhaps there are clues to the type of booze in the drinking vessels themselves, which the artist has taken care to depict differently. The man on the left is pouring from a jug into a horn, so is this ale? The man standing left of the bench is holding a goblet - wine? The man in the middle of the bench is holding a conical-shaped vessel - mead? The man on the right of the bench has a cup which has steamy ornamentation coming from the top - mulled wine or punch? I defer to the expert drinkers/historians among us for answers to these intriguing and important questions.

The man on the left of the bench is not drinking. Instead, his right hand is raised in what appears to be a priestly blessing. He has the air of piousness and authority and helps to give a more sober, religious feel to the scene. Further evidence that the event is connected with Easter.

On a more general note, has anyone noticed the curious way that the artist depicts Saxon midriffs: the exaggerated round bellies? You can see this on the three attendants in the April scene, but it is a universal feature throughout the calendar on men who are wearing a short tunic - the laborer's, servants and youths. What does this signify? My guess is that this depicts the fact that the artist wanted to portray the common people as well-nourished and therefore contented. In those times, hunger and even starvation would have been an ever-present threat, so having enough to eat would have been one of the most important factors affecting quality of life. It's interesting how this contrasts with today's portrayal of contentment, usually by a smiling face. My friends and family would be understandably miffed if I published drawings of them with fat tummies (even if they had them in real life). Different times, different priorities.

Note that the people seated on the bench do not have the round belly. They presumably are rich enough not to have to worry about hunger.



Why not let us follow you and your Facebook/Insta accounts and we can help you with your smallholding dreams and promote your goods to SFTG followers?



Jobs for the month

By Caroline Upton

I know the winter months are supposed to quiet but there's still lots we can do ahead of spring and the next growing season.

Making leaf mould should be a job on everyone's lists. Great for adding structure to heavy soils and really easy to make. Simply rake up the fallen leaves and if you can, shred them using a lawn mower as that helps them break down quickly. Pop them into a bin bag or empty compost bag, punch a few holes into the bottom of the bag with a fork, make sure the leaves are moist (use a watering can if needed) and then tie up the bag and put them to one side for 12 months. Voila! Leaf mold.

Other jobs include: Pruning climbing roses between now

Another thing which you may have noticed is the lack of any women in the pictures so far. Sadly, there are none pictured in any of the 12 scenes as far as I can make out. Admittedly, common women would have been mainly involved in family and domestic tasks, which are not the subject of the calendar, but the total absence of any female figure makes me wonder if there was a taboo or injunction on the portrayal of women, especially in religious documents such as this. Also, allowances have to be made for the fact that the artist's world of the religious community of Canterbury would have been unusually male dominated.

Although much has changed, one thing that we do have in common to the people of those days is the need for festivals, celebrations and events. In Saxon times these must have provided a welcome relief from the hard physicality of daily life and the threat of doom from various quarters. Nowadays only a small minority of us do any hard labour and survival is less of an issue. However modern life gives us plenty of mental stress, so I suspect that these events provide as much of a psychological pressure-release valve for us as they did for our Saxon ancestors. The recent lack of socialising due to Coronavirus has made us all appreciate today's social gatherings. In the farming world this year, the return of the South of England Agricultural Show in June was a welcome relief as were local smallholders' gatherings such as the Small Farm Training Group AGM in November (pictured below) which was a heart-warming evening, helped by some funny speeches and a generous amount of free food and drink, although I didn't see anyone quaffing ale from a cow's horn.



and February, Tie up your Christmas brussels sprouts to supports to ensure they don't fall over in the winter weather; Cover winter veg such as kale and other brassicas to protect them from pigeons; winter prune fruit trees whilst they are dormant; plant amaryllis bulbs for some fab, tall flowers in about two months time; move houseplants to a windowsill to make the most of the available light but be sure to move them back before summer to avoid scorching the leaves; decorate trees and tall shrubs with outdoor fairy lights to bring some festive cheer to gardens.



Best 'Walnut Ketchup' recipe (probably)

By Caroline Upton

Pork is a firm favourite in our house (and I suspect that might be the case in some of your houses too) and walnut ketchup makes a great partner to pork. This is a simple recipe so do give it a go.

If anyone has other recipes that they want to share please email it to me on



editor@sftg.org.uk and I'll publish it.

Prep 5 min
Cook 10 min
Serves 6-8

Ingredients

200g of pickled walnuts and
100ml of the pickling
vinegar
50g light brown sugar

Method

Put the walnut pickling
vinegar into a pan with the
sugars and boil until the
sugars are dissolved.

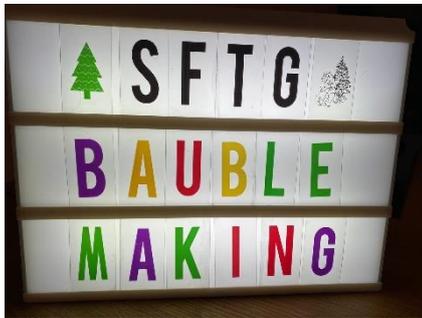
Put the pickled walnuts and
pickling vinegar into a
blender and blitz until
smooth. Pass through a fine
sieve and into either a
squeezy bottle or jar and
then serve with pork!



Letter from the Editor

By Caroline Upton

It's been a mild December so far. Which hasn't been great for the parsnips as they normally need a good few frosts to sweeten them up, but I'm not complaining about the milder weather. It's meant I can do more, slightly late, gardening jobs and I've even started some early sowing in the



Bauble Making

By Caroline Upton

This course was very appropriate. I mean, who doesn't love a festive bauble! Our very own Jay stepped up to take this course and it was fab. The lovely Zoe was the 'hostess with the mostest' and kept us supplied with teas, coffees, biscuits and a lovely, mulled apple juice and it was Jay's job to ensure we didn't stab ourselves with the felting needles when we got distracted by gossiping with the other ladies round the table. There was some fab results (see piccies) and I'll definitely be making more of them. Big thanks to everyone who attended, it was great to see you all!



greenhouse in preparation for a busy 2022 😊

It's been great to see more courses being held this year (what a difference to 2020!) and I've met some fab and super interesting SFTG members, I've learnt some new skills which I'll be putting to good use in the coming months and I'm looking forward to attending more courses next year (COVID restrictions permitting of course).

Please make sure you keep an eye out on the website for what's coming up and as always if anyone has any ideas for articles or would like to contribute an article, please send your ideas to editor@sftg.org.uk



Time to take my rams out

Most farmers keep their rams in for a couple of cycles, so as a ewe's cycle is about 17 days, they leave their rams in for just over a month. I always put a crayon on, so I can see when my ram has been busy, and I change the crayon on day



13. Using crayons (or paste) has two purposes - by recording when each ewe gets a coloured bottom one can calculate to within a few days (147 ± 4 days) when to expect lambs and secondly it is an early warning sign that a ram is firing blanks if many ewes are re-mated. Fortunately, I have never had an infertile ram, but I do know of friends who have and its very irritating to get no lambs or to suddenly need to beg or buy a fertile ram to go in with the ewes and to have a later lambing than originally planned.

I split my ewes into two fields of 24 - the shearlings and younger ewes with my older ram and the older girls with my inexperienced shearling ram. Jake and Ernie seem to have done a good job - although I didn't get a mass of coloured bottoms on the first night. Some years I get about 25% of my ewes mated on the first night - but a few of these girls must be on the edge of their oestrus cycle and have to be re-mated which is why I change crayon on about day 13, so they have a different coloured bottom. The majority of the ewes become pregnant in the first cycle and almost all are pregnant within two cycles. This year I have two shearlings who don't have coloured bottoms, so when I have my girls scanned in late January I will find out if they are pregnant. Occasionally a crayon mark isn't left, but they may also be infertile. Because the grass growth was good this autumn, I



would expect a higher lambing percentage than last year when my ewes were recovering from the drought of 2020. Scanning is always exciting. Commercial farmers scan so that they can feed their ewes based on how many lambs they are carrying. I don't find this very practical but I like to know how many lambs they are having, so I can go to bed once each ewe has finished lambing and also since I lamb outside and then bring the ewe in to my barn it means I know when she has finished and after a short period for bonding I can bring her in with her offspring.



Have a look in our toolshed!

By Cliff Bayliss

Having shut down our tool hire scheme a few years ago there has been demand to open it up again! At the moment we are concentrating on relatively small items that you may only need occasionally so might not want to buy. Alternatively, you might want to try a tool out before deciding to buy one yourself.

We're starting out modestly with a few items that we know people want (apple scrapper, fruit press, 'Lazy

Bacon curing and sausage making with Andrew Lake.....

By Caroline Upton

Being a commuter pig keeper, I'm always keen to explore options for what we can do with the meat so the bacon and sausage making course was one I was very much looking forward to!

Andrew is a bit of a legend. He pitches himself as an 'enthusiastic experimenter' but I think that hides a far deeper knowledge - he really knows his stuff and he knows a lot, about a lot. Bacon and Sausage making is just the start of his skills - he butchers his own pigs, he makes beer, knows his coffee and has been a member for about 20 years. He regularly commits his free time to sharing his skills and knowledge with other SFTG members and for that I applaud you, Andrew 😊.



I learnt lots of interesting things on the course such as: salting meat hardens the flesh, sugar tenderizes; nitrates and nitrites are unnecessary in the processing of meat if hygiene is good; phosphates

can increase yields in processed meat by 30%-40% and is a favourite method used for widely available meats for that very reason. That's why you get water and white residue when cooking things like shop bought bacon.

We used rice in the making of our sausages which makes them gluten free and you really can't tell the difference between that and the rusk that also gets used in sausages. It was only in the 1950's - 1960's that rice was replaced by rusk (unleavened bread). There is a wide range of sausage flavourings available - the list is huge and you can also always make your own flavourings - whatever you fancy in your sausages then just go for it. When you are making sausages, its recommended that you season, cook a bit of it in a pan and try it. And keep tweaking and trying until you're happy with the end result.

Creating the sausage links is more complicated! Looks easy. Its really not though and I'm not ashamed to say that I needed a little bit of help from the team. Then it's into the fridge with them for a few days to dry them out and allow the flavours to bed in. I'm pleased to say that the sausages were VERY tasty, and I'll definitely be making more! I can highly recommend this course 😊



Dog' weeder) and some others that we feel may be appropriate (post rammer, magpie trap). Some of these are owned by the SFTG and some by SFTG members.

Have a look at the list at www.sftg.org.uk/sftg-tool-loans and please suggest other tools we should be stocking. Also, if you have something you'd be willing to rent out then let us know.



Welcome....

We'd like to give a warm and hearty welcome to the following people who have joined the SFTG in the last few months.

Our new members are:

Maria and Malcolm Bonanno, Jane Kersel, Faye Baker, Sue Tovey and Rowan Baker, Lorraine Paton, Jez, Mary, Felicity and Talulah Williams, Robin, Emma and Meredith Creffield, Jay Kendall, Paulo Jesus and Maxine Crinall, Rebecca Mosedale and Damon, Evie and Hattie Roberts, Richard Vidal, Rebecca Magner, Alex Kingcome, Kelly and Richard Allen and Charlotte Emslie