

SMALL FARM TRAINING GROUP

March 2023 Newsletter

This month's newsletter includes:

- 1000 Years of Traditional Farming, Part 9
- A Day in the Life of a Smallholder
 - Easy Peasy Jam



March 2023

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Letter from the Chair...

By Zoe Chinman

Gosh – is it really March already...? Where has the first part of 2023 gone? (not that I'm complaining...) The life of a smallholder is pretty grim in winter, and no doubt we are all getting very excited at the thought of longer days, warmer weather and the joy that Spring brings. I know lots of you will be thankful for the weather we had in February, it does make lambing just that little bit easier.

Talking of joy... there are lots and lots of new workshops, talks, and social events in the diary for 2023, all of which should bring joy to you, our members, so do please get booking – I personally am looking forward to the first big social event of the year, the “April SFTG Quiz” – Cat has arranged a professional quiz master and it promises to be a fun night – so do come if you can make it.

On a personal note, I am also looking forward to Season 2 of the Marcus Wareing TV show, “Tales from a Kitchen Garden” on BBC Two. I know lots of our members have again been involved in the filming for that – from goat seesaws to scarecrows, so it should be a fun watch, and anything that

What events are coming up..

MARCH 2022

24th March - Free Talk -
Biodynamic Farming + Land
Healing with Homeopathy

25th March - An Introduction to
Smallholding

APRIL 2022

2nd April - Getting The Most
From Your Polytunnel

8th April - Small Small Farmers
meet the Lambs

15th April - An Introduction to
Bee-Keeping

encourages more people to get involved in smallholding must be a good thing. Look out for it on TV this spring...

And finally – if you are looking to get involved, and have a couple of hours a month to spare, we would love a couple more volunteers, very specifically anyone with marketing experience or Mailchimp knowledge who could take on the task of sending update emails to the membership? Please do give me a call on 07540 633909 – the SFTG Committee work so hard at arranging workshops and events and we could really do with some extra help communicating these to our members.

Hope to see lots of you at an event very soon,

Zoe x



1. September's illustration from the Julius work calendar

1000 years of traditional farming – Part 9: September

By Paul Lovatt-Smith

“I am bigger and fatter than a well-masted swine, the bellowing boar, who in the beech-wood dwells happily, rooting up the dark soil”¹

¹ <https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/>

These magnificent verses, from the 11th Century Exeter Book of Riddles (number 40), set the scene for September's illustration from the calendar. As the days shorten towards the autumn equinox, we are back in the woods. The British Library describes this scene as “hunting with pigs”. You may not be surprised that I am going to offer an alternative description: “herding pigs”. The reasons for this will hopefully become clear in the following paragraphs.

Two men, one with a hound at heel, are closely following a herd of five swine, who are foraging for food in amongst the woodland trees and bushes. The men don't appear to be in postures which would indicate that they were about to try to kill the pigs and neither do the pigs appear to be running away from the men, even though they are apparently very close.

Although both men have spears, these would be useful for directing and controlling the pigs as well as for knocking down acorns and other pig food

15th April - Willow Workshop - Spheres/Willow Objects

17th April - Lakedown Brewery and Tap Roomfirst annual SFTG trivia quiz

22nd April - An Introduction to Smallholding

22nd April – Meet the Member

MAY 2023

13th May - Ruminant Herbal Health - A brief Introduction with Kate Scott BSc (Hons) Herbal Medicine

17th May - Rearing Meat Rabbits for Smallholders (Wednesday Evening Workshop)

20th May - Bread making

27th May - Biodynamics & Shamanism

JUNE 2023

2nd June - Free talk on solar panels and battery storage

3rd June - Beginners Pressure & Water Bath Canning Workshop

17th June - Strawberry Tea

24th June - Midsummer Members BBQ 2023

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

from the trees. As offensive weapons the spears would be necessary for protection against wild beasts - wolves were still part of the fauna of 10th Century England – and perhaps to deter villainous poachers looking for a free hog roast. The dog would have added to the security of the party, as well as helping to round up and drive the pigs. Schweinhund by name but not by nature, I suspect.

Figure 2 shows the detail of the two men. The one on the left is blowing on a large horn, which although used by huntsmen, would also be a good way of signalling a swineherd's whereabouts to his companions. On his right is a better dressed man in stockings and a cape, likely therefore to be the senior. In his left hand he holds a curved object which, in a similar scene in a contemporary copied manuscript, Cotton Tiberius B V2 , appears to be a bell.

2 https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v11_f002r



Figure 2: The two swineherds and hound

Another argument for herding and not hunting is the timing of the scene: September marks the beginning of the autumn piggy banquet. The food on offer in this al-fresco dining is the kind of balanced omnivorous diet that nutritionists would love us all to eat, if only our digestive system were up to it. Carbohydrate abounds in the form of acorns, sweet chestnuts, hazel nuts and beech mast. There's fruit such as crab apples,

blackberries, hips and haws. Vegetable matter is everywhere as leaves and roots. For protein, there is a variety of insects, grubs, worms and other creepy-crawlies in the leaf litter and soil, not to mention the odd truffle, if only we had the nose to sniff them out.

Pigs are the perfect middlemen to find or dig up and consume this free spread and then speedily and very efficiently turn it into meat. Pigs have a constitution and digestive system which puts ours to shame. In particular they thrive on acorns which we find nasty and poisonous, unless soaked in water to take away the tannins. Looking closely, I think the artist has taken the trouble to depict this prime type of pig food (Figure 3).

Facebook:
Small Farm Training Group



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?



How competitive are you?

By Jay Kendall

From County and village shows to the International Marmalade awards I've entered a fair few over the years. Before I started preserving most of my entries were either knitted, hand spun, felted or woven. From tea cosies to Christmas puddings, hand spun yarn to felt pictures the rosettes were always exciting to win.

I was lucky to win a bursary for Denman college shortly after joining Ringmer Country market, I chose the preserving course & it was there I began my journey. Spinning and felt making took a back seat while I built up my customer & supplier base, all the while entering a few jars of my preserves into local shows. It took a few years & a lot of courage to enter the International Marmalade Awards, thousands of entries from across the world are received at Dalemain mansion in Cumbria but have managed to win a couple of awards each



Figure 3: Oak leaf above with pigs eating acorns and foliage below

A pig can put on weight with remarkable speed and efficiency, compared with our species. Much smaller than a human baby at birth, if let loose on the right quantity and type of food it can pile on the pounds so that at a mere 7 months old, it weighs as much as an adult human. This can go too far - I have heard tales of pigs dying of over-eating after being set free on an unlimited supply of acorns in the New Forest. At other times of the year, the friendly, docile farmyard pig fulfils its role as a waste food recycling unit, gobbling up virtually anything organic, human excrement included if hungry enough. Rare exceptions, in our experience, include raw mushrooms and citrus fruit.

In Saxon times the Weald of Sussex, Kent and Hampshire, a huge area covering 30 by 120 miles, provided life-supporting seasonal pig food for the surrounding communities. The poor clay and sandy soils at the centre of this geological anticline meant it was still a relatively uninhabited area of woodland and heathland – the literal meaning of weald is forest in Old English. There were fixed spots in which the swineherds from different peoples would set up camp. The suffix “-den” in town and village names indicates that the settlement was originally used for swineherding. Tenterden, for example is derived from Old English Tenetwaradenn meaning the swine-pasture of the people of Thanet. The Thanetians’ swine would have had a 35 mile journey to their autumn gastro-holiday in the Weald, quite a trip for a herd of hungry pigs.

The excellent book, “Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming” by Debbie Banham and Rosamund Faith (Oxford University Press, 2014) contains a wealth of information on this now-extinct tradition. The annual communal herding of pigs in wooded areas to take advantage of the mast season, controlled by the landlord in “pannage” agreements, was an integral part of the Saxon

year, the Gold has so far eluded me but it is still an honour to be awarded anything, Some competitions will give you the judges comments which is very useful, rather than just place you 1st/2nd/3rd or highly commended, the comments help you to improve. If you don't know why you were awarded a 2nd place it's difficult to know why someone else's entry was better than yours. WI judges are well trained and most of the time will leave you notes, the marmalade awards also send you notes after judging so you know how you can improve.

Before lockdown there were many opportunities to show livestock, ploughing skills, crafts, cooking, flower arranging, vegetables, photography etc and hopefully there is a show near you with classes for adults and children to enter. The most important thing about entering a show is READ THE SCHEDULE, some judges will disqualify an entry if it does not conform to the rules listed in the schedule. If the schedule asks for 5 jam tarts, don't enter 4 or 6! If you're asked to enter a photograph of a cat, it must be a cat! It may seem obvious but having been a steward at a few shows it's surprising the simple mistakes entrants make. There is advice online about entering competitions, or talk to other members.

Most shows make a nominal charge for each entry, usually free for the children, probably more for livestock. Village shows are a very sociable affair, a place for networking, learning and having fun. The South of England show used to be the show case for the local WI groups and top flower arrangers, lockdown seems to have put an end to those. My favourite show was the Rare Breed show at Singleton, always

traditional farming year. Herds could number in the hundreds, probably consisting of the combined swine of many individual owners to whom they would be returned for housing in sties at the end of the mast season. A Saxon swineherd therefore had great responsibility and contemporary records of high wages show that their skill was valued.



Figure 4: A swineherd cutting food from above for a young pig. November's picture on Brooklands church font, Kent. 11th Century

In the New Forest pannage, or common mast, is still carried out by local farmers. The season lasts for 60 days, starting in mid-September. Up to 600 pigs are involved and they have to wear noserings to protect the ground. What of the pigs on the Calendar themselves, are they domesticated or wild? They

have some of the characteristics of wild boar: they are hairy and one has a small set of tusks (Figure 5). However, these characteristics do not preclude them from being domesticated. On our smallholding we have had "Iron Age" pigs, a cross between a farmyard breed and wild boar, which looked similar (Figure 6).



Figure 5: The Five pigs



Figure 6: Iron Age pigs eating foraged acorns on our smallholding, Nov 2019.

a very social affair with the childrens animal handling class the icing on the cake.

I hope these competitions are revived, I know we have the Heathfield show to look forward to, I hope they have a domestic section to enter! We have a big membership now and I hope that lots of us will be entering as many competitions as we can in 2023. If you need any encouragement just drop me a line. And good luck!



Letter from the Editor

By Caroline Upton

I love spring. There's something amazing about seeing new life springing from the ground following the desolation of the winter months. What it also means is the start of the busy period!

March is the time for planning this year's veg crops and also getting a start on some sowing of peas and beans. Whilst you can sow some early varieties of beans and peas, given the recent weather it would be prudent to sow them inside a greenhouse or on a window ledge to avoid the frosts. I've started the first batch and am planning to sow several more batches of them to ensure we can keep cropping them over

Pigs have been an integral part of traditional farming on our smallholding for the last 12 years. We usually buy three “weaners” from local breeders at 2 months old in June or July which means that we too can take advantage of the free food on offer during the autumn. We save so much food this way that, by the time that they go for slaughter at the end of November, we generally have only had to buy around a quarter of the concentrate feed that would otherwise have been necessary.

The Weald, where we live, although much changed from the wilderness of Saxon times, is still heavily wooded and I have over the years considered asking our woodland-owning neighbours about the possibility of a pannage agreement. I’m quite attracted by the idea of spending some time swineherding in the woods but I don’t know how obliging our young and boisterous pigs would be in keeping to boundaries and returning obediently to our smallholding. There are smart collars now being used for fenceless keeping of cattle and sheep but these are apparently untested with pigs.

Pannage being a step too far, we humans do the foraging for them. Acorns, apples, sweet chestnuts, pumpkins and other surplus veg from the kitchen garden form a large part of their foraged diet. On shortening autumn days it’s enjoyable and satisfying to go gathering a haul of sweet chestnuts in our neighbour’s woods, with their kind permission of course. Every sweet chestnut is a bit of a sausage, I always say.

Figure 7: Foraging for sweet chestnuts, October 2021



Like all our livestock, we strive to give our pigs as happy a life as possible. They exist not just for our benefit but, because they have an integral role in our chosen practice of traditional farming.

They are kept outdoors in a roughly 500 square meter pasture enclosure with an ark for shelter. They love to dig and by the end of their stay, have turned over every bit of their patch. They are healthy - we have only once in 12 years had to give any medication and this was due to inexperience in

husbandry. Although in wetter years the patch looks like a First World War battlefield by the time the pigs go, this biological cultivation is put to good use because the pig patch is used the following year for growing cereals, nowadays mainly wheat. By springtime, when the corn is sown, the mud has mostly dried out and the ground is easier to cultivate than fresh pasture. The pig manure increases fertility and in summer the patch has a very different look (Figure 8). Pasture vegetation regenerates naturally under the corn and takes over after harvest. The pig patch is moved on to a fresh piece of pasture so that the ground has a chance to recover for a couple of years at least.

the summer months.

If you have cloches then these can be used on the veg beds now to warm up the soil ready for planting.

If your daffodils or other spring bulbs are starting to fade or have gone over, remove the seedheads that will be forming but leave the foliage to die back naturally. The seedheads take precious energy away from the bulb and by removing them, the bulb can take up that energy ready for next year’s display.

March is also the last month for pruning roses so make sure that’s on your garden to-do list... make sure you have sharp and clean secateurs as this will help avoid any infections or dieback on the rose and make sure you cut to an outward facing bud, removing any growth that is dead or diseased. Rambling roses should not be pruned, they need to be done straight after flowering in the summer. Bush roses can be pruned now and pruned hard but shrub roses, if they are pruned too hard will only produce leafy growth so require a lighter touch. Climbing roses can be pruned close to their established framework.



A day in the life of a smallholder

By Karen Boehm

Hi there, my name is Karen and together with my partner, Ed, we run a 5 acre smallholding in



Figure 8: A heavily dug-over pig patch in November 2021 and the following wheat crop with pasture understorey in July 2022

Towards the end of November the supply of foraged food is running out and it's time for the pigs to go on the one-way mystery tour to the abattoir. The pigs walk up the ramp of our livestock trailer by themselves, lured by food, which minimises the stress of loading. Unfortunately our local abattoir has stopped doing pigs and the journey is now an hour or more. When they are unloaded they seem more interested in looking for food than contemplating the meaning of their new surroundings. They stay together in a pen alongside the other batches of pigs before they are each in turn made unconscious in a few seconds with an electric current. Their unconscious body is moved into another room to be killed and processed. The process is highly regulated, the staff are skilled and it is a much under-valued job. Having got to know them well, I believe that the pigs know virtually nothing about what is going on. Home slaughter might be more humane, and certainly a lot cheaper but we have not yet tried this. It was the norm in days gone by and I know of at least one backyard pig keeper locally who has done it successfully. It needs organisation and planning and current legislation says that only the householders where the pigs were raised can eat the meat. In Saxon times, all killing and butchering would have been done locally or on the farm. An illustration on the 11th Century font of Brookland parish church shows how the initial stunning of a pig was done: a well-aimed blow to the head with the blunt side of an axe (Figure 9). Nowadays this would be done with a suitably powerful gun.



Figure 9: Killing a pig for Christmas. December's picture on Brookland parish church font, Kent, 11th Century

Ours go to a local butcher and a few days later, family and friends who co-own the pigs spend a Saturday freezing and salting joints and making sausages. Each family has their own sausage recipe, according to individual taste. Our favourites are pork and leek or mixed herb. A week later is bacon day, when we slice and vacuum-pack the salted belly and loin joints in half-pound bags which can then be frozen. These days of communal work, making food for the year ahead are fun and fulfilling; the last task in 5 months of feeding and caring for our pigs.

Surrey. Recently, a friend asked me why I have to go down there yet again, as she did not quite understand what I actually do! That made me stop and think: what actually do I do all day? I sat down with a cup of tea in front of the fire and made a list. Actually, looking at the fire gave me the first clue as I not only collected the wood but used our saw bench and the log splitter (both on a tractor, a saving grace!) to make the lovely logs I was just burning. But that was just the start of the chores that need to be done

Animal husbandry - It all started very small, with just a few chickens and has since spiralled into way more. We now breed silkies, Barnevelder, ducks, geese, foreign finches amongst some other breeds of birds, and I am starting out with my lovely Golden Guernsey goats to build up my closed herd. My aim is to breed to a herd of about 15 to 20 goats with lovely features and a good milk yield to boot!



Growing - My aim is to grow as many vegetables as we possibly can myself. This means preparing the outside areas before seeding/planting and preparing the huge polytunnel for the seasons. By now I need to keep a diary to not lose track as the growing area is large by now!



Figure 10: Sausage-making in the garage, Nov 2022

The weight of pork amounts to around 40 kg per pig which can last one family the best part of the next year. Most of the animal is eaten, including offal, trotters and ears. Unlike supermarket pork, ours has a generous amount of fat, up to an inch thick on the back bacon, which provides both energy and taste. This is healthy and nourishing food, appreciated for the animal it was and the meal it has provided.

Are we cruel and heartless to raise and kill animals to eat? Is our method of farming bad for the planet? Is eating meat unhealthy? There is now a forest of information available to help you answer these vitally important questions. If you venture into these woods, dear reader my advice is to avoid the poisonous plants of poor science, hypocrisy and unfounded opinions and to look for the nourishing acorns of good science, practical experience and historical facts.

Sadly, nowadays most of us are not able, or willing, to eat traditionally-farmed pork. The population in England has swelled to more than 30 times what it was in the 10th Century. The Wealden forest is reduced to a patchwork of woodland, farmland and heathland, thankfully somewhat protected, and a new forest of buildings and roads has grown over the surrounding lowland and coast, with more and more farmland disappearing under tarmac, bricks and concrete each year.

In order to feed this large population, life for the commercially-farmed pig is very different. Most are kept indoors in huge sheds and never see the light of day. Stress and disease are constant threats and there is a high degree of antibiotic use. No longer is the pig a welcome consumer of wild and waste food. Inputs are strictly controlled and feeding kitchen waste is illegal. Instead they live on a formulated concentrate of cereals and legumes, including soya imported from the recently deforested Amazon. No wonder that the day is fast approaching when meat made from bacteria in a factory will take over from such unsustainable and cruel farming methods.

Most people will have little choice but to eat this bacterial pseudo-meat. But if it's true that you are what you eat, then won't a diet of artificial food



Harvesting - Because of our polytunnel I can now grow melons, peppers and tomatoes successfully and prolong the growing season by months! Very pleased with it although not a hurry to build one this size again soon! (48 x 22 x 9 feet, in case you wonder..)



Preserving - I love preserving my home grown food and use different methods for different things. In order to preserve without the need for a freezer I use my pressure canner (US import) to can meat and other things to store them at room temperature. It's a great way of complimenting the other preserving methods like pickling, preserves and water bathing, just to mention a few.



Cleaning - One of the things I do, on a daily basis, is cleaning, cleaning and some more cleaning! The amount of muck our animals produce is

eventually lead to artificial humans? I'd like to think that I'll pass on that and that I'll be in a den somewhere in the woods, herding pigs.



Easy Peasy Jam

By Jay Kendall

Ingredients:

1 Kilogram of Berries*

750g granulated sugar

The juice of a lemon

(*strawberries are very low on pectin & need jam sugar whereas most other berries are higher and granulated sugar can be used**)

The Kit:

Sterilised jam jars & lids**

Big saucepan/preserving pan

A saucer in freezer

Measuring jug

(**A word on lids - use only those that aren't tainted by pickles as these will ruin your jam! If in doubt ask me, I can supply you with new ones)

Method:

Place the sterile jars & lids on a tray in oven on low heat.

In big saucepan or preserving pan, gently cook the berries in a little water & lemon juice (just enough to stop the berries sticking).

Gradually add sugar stirring all the time until completely dissolved.

Raise heat up to a rolling boil. Carefully & slowly stir to make sure the jam isn't sticking to bottom of pan, the jam will rise up so a wide pan is better than a straight sided one.

astounding and with cleaning coops, stables and runs, it takes up a lot of time to keep on top of it.



And then there's the rest - like with all of you, the things we do vary from season to season. In spring, summer, autumn there is the topping of the fields, the upkeep of the fences and general maintenance. Bigger projects we normally tackle in winter (like building work etc.) as then the daily workload is a bit less! Bye for now!



Your committee members

By Caroline Upton

We'd love to hear from you! For anyone wanting to reach out the SFTG committee members then please find our contact details below as well as who does what...

Chairperson

Zoe Chinman

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Vice Chair

Debbie Gordon

ViceChair@sftg.org.uk

After five minutes Carefully take a spoonful of jam & put on cold saucer, keep an eye on pan to make sure it's not burning. Run your finger through jam on saucer, if it leaves a trail through then it's setting. If runny the jam needs more cooking. Repeat this until you reach a set.

Carefully pour jam into measuring jug & leave to cool for about 20 mins. Make coffee. Enjoy.

Remove hot jars from oven & carefully pour jam into them, fill to very top, leave no gap. Put lids on tightly & leave to cool. Label when cold.



Raising Meat Rabbits....

By Denise Taylor, Hope Springs Smallholding

I attended a really interesting course on Raising Meat Rabbits, with other SFTG members led by Zoe Chinman in February.

We learned facts such as why people were positively encouraged to raise rabbits for meat during the wars to ensure they had a healthy delicious meat to eat.

We looked at the different foods and housing required to raise healthy breeding rabbits, plus we got hands-on experience handling the rabbits, and learning how to sex them, and then we finished off with putting a buck with a doe to witness the mating process (didn't expect to do that on a sunny Saturday morning).

My smallholding now has a gorgeous pair of breeding does waiting to meet Mr Right later in the year.

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Welcome....

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

Frances Gorringe, Joe O'Hara,
Katie Bloom, Richard Tye,
Sandra Bax, Edwin Woodhams,
Michael Evans, Harry Leckstein,
Sarah Jane Dowler, Beverly
Lunn, Nick Sterling