

Iford Estate News

J & H Robinson Iford Farms Ltd – est. 1895

www.ifordestate.com

Issue 2

Spring 2015



Horn vs Corn!

Ben Taylor, Estate Manager



It is surprising how often old adages are found to be true. One that is particularly apt at the moment is 'Up Horn Down Corn', meaning that livestock fares best financially when arable production is in the doldrums.

With April being the end of the financial year I have spent the last couple of weeks preparing budgets and forecasts for the year ahead. Into the mix go a great many variables – price, yield, costs, etc. It was fairly sobering to forecast an average wheat price of £140/ton for top quality milling wheat and only £115 for feed wheat. This compares with two years ago when I was disappointed to sell at £232/ton!

As it happens the crops generally look well and, barring drought or pestilence, we can expect to harvest some reasonable yields, albeit nowhere near enough to make up for the reduced price.

That said and, as the adage goes, the livestock enterprise is forecast to be comparatively good. When the wheat price is low the cost of feed reduces. Also, the low beef returns over the last few years (when by contrast it was 'Up Corn Down Horn') have resulted in a contraction in the national herd, and this reduced supply of beef has meant that price levels have been maintained.

All of which makes me realise how lucky we are here at Iford to have a truly mixed farm. For the next year or two the beef herd will hopefully help make ends meet until we see better prospects in the arable enterprise.

Back on the farm most of the crops are now sown. By the time you read this the peas will be in the ground, leaving just maize to go. We have been busy applying fertiliser; spraying off the last of the weeds and applying a protectant fungicide to the new leaves. Timing is everything these days, and especially so when it comes to spraying crops. We aim to spray at precise intervals to protect the leaves that emerge as the crop grows. This prevents infection getting in and saves larger doses of chemical should this happen. It also helps preserve the active ingredients from the build up of resistance.

Calving is now in full swing. At the time of writing, less than half the herd has calved and, unusually, we have had five sets of twins so far. We are trying to work out why this might be; it would be nice to be able to do the same every year! Nearly all the non-calving animals are now outside enjoying a bit of sunshine and some lovely looking grass. It's always a great relief to get out of the drudgery of feeding animals every second day during the winter and to see the excitement of the cows as they get a taste of freedom after six months shut in a shed.

Finally, June 7th is *Open Farm Sunday* and we would like to invite all residents of Iford, Swanborough and Kingston to join us between 11am and 1pm for some working demonstrations, a chance to look at, and sit in, the tractors, the combine and the range of machinery and even quiz the drivers about how they work, what they do and so on. There will also be a self-guided walk and a quiz for children. I hope you can all make it!

DATE FOR THE DIARY
Open Farm Sunday
June 7th 2015 11am-1pm
See www.ifordestate.com 'Community' for more details

Once upon a time pretty much the whole of Iford was owned by the Robinson family and run as a mixed farm. Virtually everyone who lived in the village worked on the farm – and everyone's lives revolved around the farming community.

Today, many of the village houses are privately owned or rented, only a handful of people work on the farm and many of the farm buildings are used by businesses as shops and workshops.

The community has changed, but it is still a community. For those of us who live here, our lives are enriched by the environment we have inherited – and, in some instances, created – and the people who share it with us.

As the farm has grown (and Swanborough is now part of it) and the workforce shrunk, the communication between us as to what is going on on the farm has all but disappeared. This newsletter sets out to try to help redress the balance.

I hope you enjoy it!

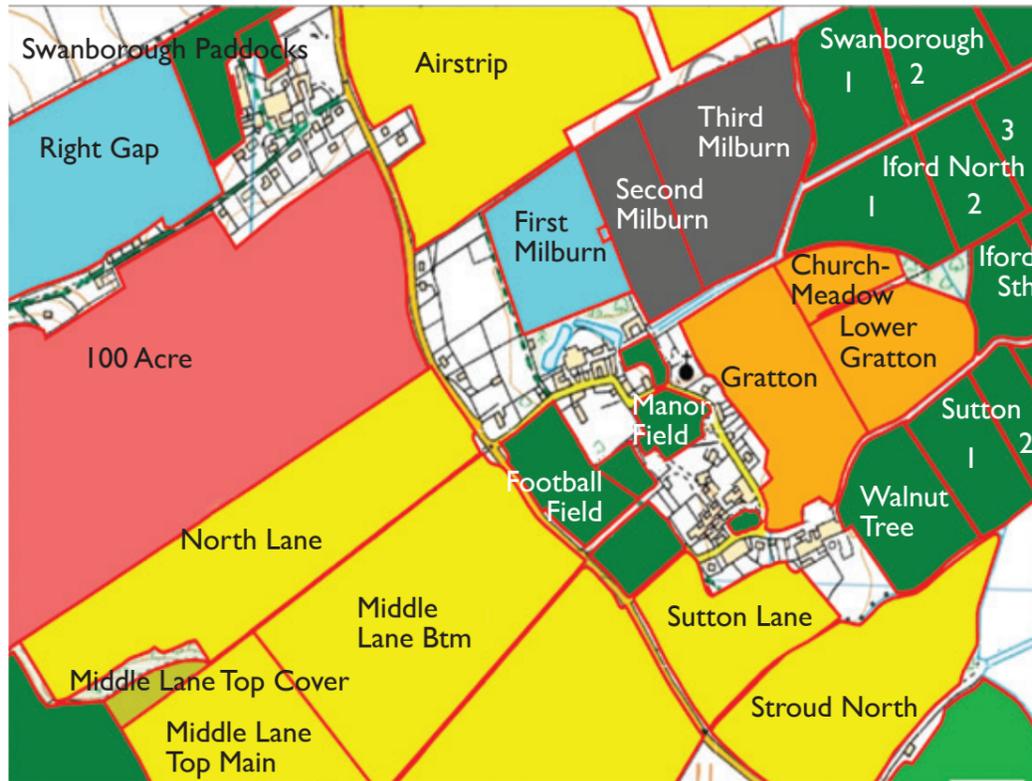
John Robinson

...and whilst on the subject of 'corn'

See what crops are growing near you

KEY to CROPS

- Wheat
- Maize
- Spring barley
- Sweet corn
- Grass
- Peas



Cetti's warbler

Rich birdlife on our doorstep

We are lucky at Iford to have one of the most varied habitats for birds in Sussex. The combination of village gardens, farmland, chalky South Downs, river, watermeadows, reedy dykes and ponds means that on an hour or two's walk one can count 40 or more species of bird even if some of them are more heard than seen.

One such is a chirpy little thing that belts out a loud 'pieces-of-eight' call from a reedbed yet is almost impossible to see. It is only in recent years that the Cetti's warbler (pronounced 'chettys') has become well-established in Britain and, unlike most of our warblers, it doesn't migrate but stays here all year round.

They are unlikely to have been heard at all back in the 1980s when, with advice from the RSPB, we dug the one hectare wildlife pond, leaving an island and adding a bird hide and rampart to hide one's approach. At this time of year the pond is home to a wide variety of geese and duck – teal, mallard, widgeon, shoveller; tufted – to

name but a few. You can also see lapwing, little grebes, nesting cormorants, and another bird that has become commonplace now but was a rarity two or three decades ago – the little egret, a bright white miniature heron that stalks the shallows for small fish. The hide is not on a public footpath but we are happy for members of the Sussex Ornithological Society and others to use it if they let us know and as long as the bird sightings book is filled in.

April and May are always an exciting time for birds with the arrival of the migrants. Chiffchaffs are usually the first, then the swallows and martins, shortly followed by the blackcaps, willow warblers, reed warblers and whitethroats. And have you heard the increasingly rare cuckoo yet?



The view of the wildlife pond from the bird hide



Then and Now



Mr Blaber c1930
The water tank on the cart is still in use on the estate today



New website www.ifordestate.com

If you have a spare few minutes do please have a look at the new Iford Estate website.

There are sections on our history, farming and environment. We have links to the websites of each of the businesses (featured in the panel on the right) and under 'Leisure' we have pages on the Iford Downs and Swanborough Shoots, the airstrip,



The Tench Lake

fishing lakes and our small DIY livery yard. It also draws attention to the fact that the village hall can be hired for events and as a wedding venue.

You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter and even ask for an electronic version of this newsletter! All our contact details can be found there too.

Businesses on the Iford Estate

We have a wide range of offices and workshops in our midst (with no vacancies at present). For website links go to www.ifordestate.com

- ANNABELS KITCHEN**
- Catering for all occasions
- ASHDOWN SITE INVESTIGATION**
- Ground investigation and geotechnical consultants
- AUTOPAINTS**
- Distributors of paint and refinishing products
- BIMBLE SOLAR**
- Suppliers of solar panels and equipment
- FITM FURNITURE**
- Bespoke upholstery and antique restoration
- GOODMAN WOOD**
- Carpentry work, specialising in furniture
- GRAIN FURNITURE**
- Manufacturers of bespoke fitted furniture
- IMAGO PHOTOGRAPHIC**
- Fashion photography
- LEWES TAXIS**
- ORANGE BADGE MOBILITY**
- Wheelchairs, mobility scooters and stairlifts
- READING ROOM DAY SPA**
- Boutique day spa
- REFLEX**
- Instrumentation for the global minerals industry
- RISE JOINERY**
- Quality bespoke joinery
- RUGGED MANAGEMENT**
- Artist management and touring agency
- SOUTH EAST METAL SERVICES**
- Designs in metal and glass
- THE COSTUME STORE**
- Costume accessories
- THE IRON WORKS**
- Ironing and laundry



The Barn Yard sold in 1988 – now a swimming pool

The need for Long Term Thinking

John Robinson

When I joined my father at Iford in 1970 he had just completed modernising all four dairies, replacing cowsheds where four people milked 50 cows, with what were then 'state-of-

the-art' milking parlours where one man milked and looked after 60 cows. It wasn't long however before I realised that other progressive farmers were milking as many as 80 cows in one-man units and so, driven by the cost/price squeeze that is always present in the agricultural industry, we set about expanding each unit again by adding on a small extension to each set of buildings. We thought that we had reached the limit of how many cows one man could milk.

How wrong we were, because over the years we repeated the process several times until, at the turn of the century, we had consolidated the four herds into two, with one man in each, milking 180 cows on his own. This was carried out in a collection of buildings that consisted of so many extensions that the work had become very difficult and time consuming and future expansion was now physically impossible – and this at a time when the most efficient dairy farms were milking in 250-cow units. In 2003 we gave up the unequal struggle, shut down the units and went from being one of the largest and best known dairy herds in the country to nothing overnight.

The reason I am telling this story is that every decision we took seemed to be the right one at the time because it sorted out the immediate problem. We thought that we had reached the limits of what was technically possible but, with hindsight (a wonderful thing!), in the long term all proved to be wrong. Because we had no long term plan, every building extension we made just made the next change more difficult to implement and the unit harder to work in. If we had had a long term plan (and a crystal ball) and had worked steadily towards it, we could possibly still be milking today.

Now, having bought Swanborough Farm last summer, to create the Iford Estate, it is obvious that exactly the same thought processes have gone on there. We are faced with a set of buildings all added higgledy-piggledy that are frankly not fit for purpose and all now need replacing – but with what? It is necessary now to consider the buildings at Iford and Swanborough as one unit. We need to take a long term view of the future so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past by continuing to build extensions that turn out yet again to be in the wrong place.

To that end we have commissioned 'Acorus', who are the leading national firm of agricultural architects and planning advisors to look at the estate in its entirety and come up with a plan of what it should look like in 30 years' time. Iford, of course, presents particular problems because my grandfather, my father and I have gone to great pains to fit the farm buildings into spaces that don't spoil the enjoyment of the houses and of the people who live and work in the village. We have also gone to great trouble to maintain green spaces within the village which we obviously wish to keep. That policy however has meant that most farm buildings have had to be 'squashed in' to small spaces and most are now too small to work in with modern farm vehicles. Our only 'proper' farm building is the new grain store at Lower.

What will Iford and Swanborough look like in 30 years' time? The only reasonably certain assumption that I can make is that the estate that financially supports the villages will be larger than it is today resulting in more vehicle movements. A probable assumption is that it will be run by fewer staff. Modern technology is advancing in leaps and bounds and, believe it or not, driverless tractors and the widespread use of drones for monitoring crops are now only a year or two away.

Preliminary observations from Acorus indicate that they are looking at separating farm and village life. I imagine that not too many people would welcome the idea of driverless tractors tearing through the villages! There are important decisions to be taken and in today's modern climate it is important that all residents have a say in the long term future of the two villages of Iford and Swanborough. Please let me have any suggestions that you would like to make. In the meantime, when Acorus have given us their main report we will organise a village meeting to discuss their recommendations with you.

Iford & Swanborough Village Day

2.00pm Saturday
17th October

To celebrate 120 years of farming at Iford and our recent acquisition of Swanborough Farm we will be holding a Village Day in Iford.

This is a private event for the residents of Iford and Swanborough only.

PROGRAMME

2.00pm Grand Opening

by Lord & Lady Baker followed by a performance by the **Ragged Phoenix Morris Dancers**. The **Lewes Ukekele Band** will also be playing during the afternoon.

History of the Farm

John will be giving a talk in the hall entitled 'Who were J & H?' using photos from our extensive collection going back to 1895. If you would like a ticket for this event please email Ged ifordvillageday171015@ifordhall.co.uk

Concert in the Church

Anne and Neil Commin are collating the programme for this. If you would like to participate please contact Anne annecommin@gmail.com (A collection will be taken for the Church).

Village Showcase

This is an opportunity for the residents of Iford and Swanborough to display their talents alongside the offices and workshops from both villages. If you paint, sew or have any other interests you would like to share, contact Ged for a table in the marquee adjacent to the Hall.

Children's Tent

As this a fun day for all the family there will be entertainment for children throughout the afternoon.

Teas, Cakes and Bubbly
Provided during the afternoon.

Dance 6pm

The Leaky Buckets will be playing in the Hall. All welcome – children too! But as we have to restrict numbers in the Hall please apply to Ged for tickets. ifordvillageday171015@ifordhall.co.uk