

## News from the Gaddesden Estate October 2016

The autumn months following harvest are one of the busiest times of the farmer's year. First there is the sale and movement of this year's harvest, concurrently with the preparation of ground for sowing oilseed rape, which is normally done around the August Bank Holiday week-end.

We have saved a considerable quantity of wheat for seed this year, which has to be dressed, when a lorry mounted dresser arrives in the farmyard. It is fed from a grain trailer, which in turn is topped up with the telescopic loader. The seed is dressed and loaded into one tonne bags ready for the seed drill.

The land formerly in break crops, rape or beans, is prepared ready for sowing wheat for 2017 in September/October.

Normally all our wheat straw is shred and incorporated, to return structure and nutrients to the soil. However this year, the first for 16 years that we have grown barley, the barley straw has been baled by Andy Cornthwaite and transported for stock bedding.

In September there is also the Redbourn and District Ploughing Match which this year was held at Grove Farm, Flamstead and we congratulate Mick Matthews on coming second I the Vintage Class.

Many will have read of the EU ban on the use of neonicotinoid seed dressing. This was used to control cabbage-stem flea beetle which can have a devastating effect on the oilseed rape, so much so that many people in the eastern counties are giving up this important crop, which being a brassica provides a break between cereal crops. We are continuing with rape, though the ban does mean a considerably greater use of insecticide sprays.

A big change in the area is the decision by W.Hill and Son to sell Wood Farm this Michaelmas. With the retirement of our good neighbours Bob and Jenny Fiddaman, this is further likely to reduce the number of family farms in the parish. The farm was formerly part of the estate, and Halsey and Partners will be taking over the farming of the 30 acres of Gristhouse Field.

September sees the start of hedge cutting, which we do according to our Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, where the cutting is rotated to allow for biennial plants and berries for the birds. This year we have more to do, as ground conditions in winter 2015/6 meant that we couldn't complete last year's programme.

The end of August sees the third year of the revival of the President's Match on the cricket field at Briden's Camp, won again in the final over, this year by the President's team, in another nail-biting finish! Years ago when we also had the so-called "Test Match" when the estate was able to field a team against the Club, it was almost a condition of employment that people were keen cricketers. Those who saw "Countryfile" recently may remember the series of BBC films in 1978 which included this match. Several people have asked about getting DVD's of the 1977 film and my only suggestion is to contact BBC Bristol, who made it.

On the estate side of life, regular maintenance continues. Following the sad death of Len Smith we are re-furbishing 3, Bridens Camp which will be offered for letting when the work is complete.

In the garden, Michael Frewin was very successful at the Markyate village produce show, winning the Hobbs Memorial Cup, with several firsts for vegetables and dahlias and a number of second prizes.

We have had a series of successful "Park & Rides" this summer, which have been much enjoyed by those riding around our beautiful Chilterns countryside. These were topped off by the Charity Ride and Trade Fair on 25<sup>th</sup> September.

For the third time, we hosted 400 competitors to the National Field Archery Championships, which was held in several of the woods and a small music, art event, as well as welcoming Gaddesden Row School and Little Gaddesden Pre-School on visits.

Finally, we have had a spate of filming in the past months with two visits from ITV's "Grantchester" unit as well as other film companies. Grantchester filmed a cricket match at Briden's Camp, including an Austin A30 and a Morris Minor traveller for the "spectators"!

NGH