

# Ansty's Traditional Harvest Supper is back again!



Ansty Village parishioners were cordially invited to the Commandery, by kind permission of Jean Marc and Kate, to celebrate the annual traditional Harvest Supper - organised and brought back into existence by the amazing Ann Oldfield and her team after two or three of the event not happening – largely caused by the Covid Pandemic.

It was absolutely lovely to see the Harvest Supper back in the Commandery on Saturday October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. It was fantastic that Karren Price and her team at Ansty PYO & Farm Shop hosted the Harvest Tea at the Ansty Farm Shop for those missing years – but it was great to be able to bring back the centuries old tradition of the Harvest

Celebration in its rightful place!

Ann Oldfield took this mighty mission on and did a fantastic job of rallying the village into action. She skilfully delegated jobs out but none the less did a huge amount herself. Village folk came together, and the traditional stew was made, whilst others made apple pie puddings, or baked potatoes. In the Commandery, tables and chairs were moved in, the drinks bar was formed, the candles lit, and the heaters gave out a glowing heat.

When villagers arrived, the Commandery looked amazing and very welcoming! The evening's proceedings were over-looked by a Suit of Armour standing to attention in the middle of the barn!

It was a lovely evening for the village to get together and have a good old 'catch up' and much merriment and laughter was had by all. After Grace was said the village tucked in heartily to the harvest food which was delicious, and the table was soon full of empty dinner plates and pudding bowls.

A little harvest agricultural speech was given by Karren along with the help of local farmer George Dalton who kindly wrote a piece about the year on his dairy farm at Horwood which was read out too. The weather was the main topic of the talk as it really was another year of extremes be it rain, wind or sunshine!

Ann finished the evening with a great little quiz on the subject of 'Food and Drink'! Working in teams the villagers all found it challenging and fun and asked Ann if they could have extra time to complete it at home! The evening finished quite late, and everybody left the Commandery in great humour, full tummies, as well as having had a great time out with friends new and old.

Many thanks to Ann for bringing back this great Village Tradition; thanks to Jean Marc and Kate for the use of the Commandery and all who helped organise the event in any way. Thanks to Karren for sending in the reports and pictures; to farmer George Dalton for his take on the farmer's year at Horwood, to Robert Baker for his seasonal summary of his smallholding at North Cottage and to Heather Lockley for the final photo of the set below.

Do villagers hope to do this again next year? Yes Please!

# A mixed year for Horwood Farm – Harvest Report – from local farmer George Dalton.



It was a mixed year for our farming business, which comprises of growing cereal crops, and milking cows.

2022 was particularly challenging due to the drought conditions which were experienced throughout the

summer months, which resulted in a lack of grass for cows. 2023 was starting to look the same back in May, but thankfully has turned out better.

In terms of the harvest year, the autumn of 2022 was pretty normal. After the dry summer, the fear is that nature evens itself out and it doesn't stop raining! Thankfully it was dry enough to plant the autumn sown crops of winter wheat, winter barley, and oilseed rape. And after that, there was enough winter rain for the crops, but still not significant amounts to replenish the deficit deeper underground.

The spring of 2023 was looking quite dry again at one point. Having two years in a row of poor forage production is not good. I ran out of silage to feed my cows in the spring, and had to buy some in, to get through until there was enough grass in the fields again.

The relatively wet summer has been excellent for grass growth and resulted in lots of grass in the fields for cows to graze, and plenty to cut for silage and replenish the stocks for this winter.

Maize has just been harvested with good yields – it generally likes hot weather, and in between the rain, we seem to have had enough hot spells to make it grow well this season.

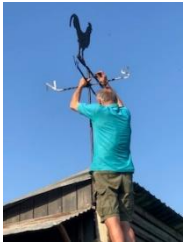
The crop growing season has been a bit more frustrating. Despite getting crops established well in the autumn, the dry period from mid-April to early July came at a critical time for the grains to swell and so overall yields were below average.

Spring sown crops like spring barley, were late being planted, due to wet and cold weather in March. They then barely had any rain on them for several months, by which time they have reduced in yield potential.

Wet spells during mid-July onwards, meant for a frustrating harvest in terms of getting the work done. There never seemed to be a straight run of good weather to go combining and harvest some dry grain. We are always hoping for several dry days in a row to bale the straw as well.

The fortunes of farming continue to be a rollercoaster ride! After a period of good returns, where the prices for milk and grain were high, and the inputs to produce those products were fixed at a relatively low cost, this last year has gone the other way. Output prices have fallen, while costs had increased significantly. These are now stabilizing to some degree. As ever, we have to look at the averages over several years.

One constant that always remains, is the joy of living and working in such a beautiful part of the world, which is never taken for granted!



## A bountiful year for the most part!

### Our second 'Harvest Report' comes from our local smallholder Robert Baker

#### General Farming Notes:

Suffice to say the crop results from the arable farmers have been rather mixed. The early barley was not good as it suffered from the May drought and the spring sown crop never had rain when it was needed and then was beaten down and spoilt by the deluge in July/August. Wheat had been yielding well but was cut wet and proved expensive to dry. Robert says a friend in Kent has produced masses of high specification milling wheat. But there are no reports of that hereabouts!

The second half of the season has produced bounteous grass for animals and that's continuing in this warm autumn weather.

#### The North Cottage Smallholder's Report:

The long drawn out cold and dry spring conditions meant all **vegetables** were difficult to grow, except the **sweetcorn**, which thrived in the late summer heat! They were considerably taller than normal plants and double-cobbed as well as making side shoots galore with cobs on them all! Potatoes waited patiently for the rain to arrive then blossomed in the mild conditions!

Our **fruit stock** was amazing: copious apricots, gooseberries, strawberries, raspberries, tay berries, plums (for a change), damsons, apples, wineberries and blackberries.



Our **Sheep** were successful but there were fewer lambs than usual, caused, we think, by fertility issues arising from the scorching hot weather we endured in 2022. The lambs grew well on the rich dry early grass, and we had success in the show rings. We were awarded best of breed at Ellingham and Ringwood.

Our **Cattle** - two heifers this year have done well after being challenged by some diseases early on and insufficient grass. All that now a distant memory since the summer rains changed everything with plenty of rich grass.

Oddly, our **poultry** began breeding late in the year, so we have young chicks in the autumn...

As I write (October 8<sup>th</sup> 2023) we have seen numerous butterflies, bees, hornets and even a hummingbird hawk moth. On a visit to Portland Bill last Friday, we saw a pair of swallows, were they the last to depart south?

Normally everything stops growing by mid-October and this late bounty, and some very warm, humid weather with it, is a welcome bonus. All could rapidly change if cold wet storms should blow in.









## **‘Agriculture keeps us all alive’**

The fields are lush, the earth is rich,  
The sun beats down, the air is brisk.  
The farmers work from dawn till dusk,  
Their hands are calloused, their hearts robust.  
The seeds are sown, the crops take root,  
The rain falls down, the plants bear fruit.  
The wheat, the corn, the barley too,  
The bounty grows, the harvest's due.  
The tractors roar, the plows they turn,  
The soil is tilled, the land they earn.  
The cows they graze, the chickens cluck,  
The pigs they wallow in the muck.  
The barns are full, the hay is stacked,  
The silos brim, the fields are packed.  
The market's open, the prices set,  
The farmers sell, their profits met.  
The cycle starts, the work begins,  
The seasons change, the cycle spins.  
The land provides, the people thrive,  
Agriculture keeps us all alive.

***Recited by Karren Price***



