

Rosemary Champion

Scottish smallholder

Born 15.7.1962

Autobiographical life story.

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Diary: Moving to Dalmore
3. Diary: Ten Years On
4. The Accidental Smallholder

*This life story has been compiled, with acknowledgement and thanks, from material on Rosemary Champion's three websites: *The Accidental Smallholder* (at www.accidentalsmallholder.net), *Dalmore Croft* (at www.dalmore.org.uk), and *Rosedean Ryelands* (at www.rosedeanryelands.co.uk).*

1. Introduction

Well, my name is Rosemary Champion. I was born and brought up in a small town in Central Scotland. I'm not from a farming background, but my paternal grandfather was a ploughman and my father was raised on a farm, my uncle was a shepherd and my maternal grandfather was a professional gardener, once employed at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh – so maybe it's in the genes somewhere.



University of Edinburgh

After failing to make the grade for vet school, I worked for a year on a dairy and pig farm, before going on to Edinburgh University to study for a BSc in Agriculture. During those four years, I worked my vacations on a mixed sheep and beef farm in beautiful North Northumberland. By the end of my second year of study, I had decided that this wasn't the right course for me – I enjoyed working on farms, but not the academic side. After graduating, I was off to do other things – catering management, personnel and training management and finally into local government administration.

In 1994, I met Dan, now my wonderful other half, and in 1999, we dug up the front garden of our little semi and planted vegetables. Until then, I had never grown anything – in fact, I could kill spider plants. But, so it began. By accident.

In 1999, we bought two semi-derelict farm cottages with an acre of land – because we liked the view. Over the next ten years, we grew vegetables and fruit, bought our first laying hens and our first weaner pigs; acquired two dogs and a variety of cats; bought our first sheep. We cured bacon, made sausages (yum) and salami (yeuch), jams and chutneys and pickles. We had some wonderful successes and a few disappointments and failures. We shared much of this through the website's diary.

In 2009, I took redundancy from the local council and at that point, TAS became my business rather than just a hobby, albeit a pretty time-consuming one. At this time, we felt we wanted more land, so bought Dalmore, our 12 acre holding in Angus. Our progress here to date is documented in the [diary](#) and in some forthcoming articles.

Our additional land has allowed us to fulfil a long-held (by me, at least) desire to have a small herd of cattle. In October 2010, we took delivery of two March born

Shetland heifers. If all goes according to plan, we will have our own milk and dairy products in 2012 and our own beef sometime thereafter.

We're still learning – and that's part of the fun. And it is fun – maybe not so much when the ground's thick with ice and I'm slithering around with water containers and bales of hay, but that's all made up for and more when the sun comes out and the lambs are bouncing around the field or when I pull the first new carrots or pod fresh peas.

We've never aimed to be self-sufficient – we love John Seymour's book but we don't live by it. Like many people, we want to reduce the impact that we make on the Earth's natural resources and live sustainably – but we won't be giving up wine, bananas or chocolate because we can't produce them here. We hope that you enjoy the site and learn something new or are encouraged to grow you own or make your own. We're not doing anything new, either.

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

2. Diary: Moving to Dalmore

Rosemary Champion's diary for May 2010 recounts the move to Dalmore.

My new toy

Sunday 2 May, 2010

We've got a petrol mower. I rarely cut the grass because a) I find it hard to start, b) it runs away with me and c) I hate the noise. But all has changed!

Dan's mum bought a Qualcast Panther 30 - fancy name for a hand cylinder mower. Since they are caravanning and have no lawn to cut, it's residing in our garage. The grass needed cut and Dan's very busy, so I decided to get the hand mower out. And it's great! I'm chuffed to bits with it.

It takes me about 40 minutes to cut the lawn. On a sunny morning like today, that was very pleasurable. It's funny how certain things take you back, but my Gran had a similar lawnmower and she used to let me cut the grass when I was a child. Using this one takes me right back to those days. It was lovely.

Horses and pigs

Sunday 2 May, 2010

The son of our livery yard owner has just bought two Saddleback weaners. Where has he put them? In a pen next to Smokey's field. This is good in the long term, as we'll have pigs and Smokey at Dalmore, so he can get desensitised now. But in the meantime, it's a bit hairy.

There are four horses in the field; Smokey, Wallace (Welsh Section D), Jack (Welsh Section A type) and Jeffrey (large coloured cob). Jack is the least bothered; Jeffrey was dripping with sweat the first evening. I've never seen a horse sweat like that - it was dripping off him.

Red mite

Monday 3 May, 2010

Damn, we've got red mite in our big hen house. I was cleaning it out this morning when I spotted the wee b*ggers. Squished a few as revenge, but decided that wasn't a great solution.

In some ways, if it was going to happen, this was as good a time as any. My hen numbers are quite low - about 25 or so, and although I was planning to restock, I haven't done anything about it yet, in anticipation of the "flitting".

We also have three other houses that have been sitting empty since last autumn - these should be able to accommodate all the hens at a squash. Finally, we were going to dismantle the house anyway for moving. The plan was to dismantle, move and reassemble in one day, but now there's a new plan, which is probably better.

Finished lambing!

Tuesday 4 May, 2010

Jura lambed last night, well, early hours of this morning. When I went out at 6.30am, she was all done and dusted - tup lamb, on his feet, but looking a bit bedraggled. They're in a mothering pen now. I haven't seen him suck, but she's plenty of milk and his belly feels full. I'll check him in an hour. Jura's the spookiest of our ewes and doesn't really welcome human intervention so I don't want to stress her.

So, same as last year - two tups, one ewe, except Juno and Jura have swapped boy for girl and vice versa. I'd have liked more ewe lambs, as I'm trying to increase the flock size. However, Dan will be pleased as I don't now have an excuse for keeping the tup lambs and he'll get his freezer lambs.

Turkey poults

Sunday 9 May, 2010

We took some time out yesterday to call on our chums, Andrew and Janis. It was great to see them and their replacement telly - an incubator! Andrew is the keeper of the CSSA incubator and is just hatching turkey poults. They are cross bred white, bronze and blacks - the breeder runs all his stags and hens together over winter before seperating them in the spring, so the first eggs are of indeterminate breeding.

I thought they would be really ugly - I think turkeys are pretty ugly, to be honest - but they are lovely. Some are brindle and some are black with yellow undersides. They are much calmer than poultry chicks - and very curious. While we had our tea, little heads were poking out of the brooder to see what was going on. One stands on the feeder so he can see better.

One week to go!

Sunday 9 May, 2010

Well, five and a half days to be accurate. And the tension is rising! And Sunday is project planning day, so we'll be reviewing our to do lists tonight. It all seemed ages away and now it seems to be rushing towards us, headlong. I've been sorting out dull but essential things like insurance and electricity, while Dan's been working on the PV and heat pump contractors. The RHET stuff is pretty busy just now, too - not surprisingly, schools want to visit farms in the better weather, but farmers are busy at silage and a lot of the stock is turned away to far fields, so there's not so much to see in bye.

Dalmore

Friday 14 May, 2010

Well, we're finally here. We got the keys today - there was a minor glitch when our mortgage money disappeared into the financial ether rather than into our solicitor's bank account - but we're in! And it's wonderful!



Dalmore: the 12 acre holding in Angus.

The house isn't as bad as we thought and it's bigger than we thought, now that it's empty. The previous owner had lots of stuff. I mean lots.

Dan's folks, John and Linda - I will refer to them as such now! - had their caravan on site and the kettle boiling immediately. It's great having them here. The weather is spectacularly good - sunny and warm, with a wee bit of a breeze. The Army are here too, but I suspect we'll not notice them soon.

The previous owner is still pottering about and still has stuff in one of the outhouses. It's a wee bit awkward, but the remaining stuff is going on Tuesday so we're prepared to cut a bit of slack.

We've started on the west range, which has the garage / workshop, looseboxes, byre and cart shed, clearing out the remaining rubbish. There's stuff all over the place so the plan is to bring it all to the barn - skipping what's rubbish and putting all the same stuff together, so we can see what we've got. There are dozens of bread baskets, drinks bottle crates, galvanised buckets, old metal dustbins and piles of timber.

Dan's brother, Mark, his wife Mo and the boys, Ben and Lewis are coming over later for a "wee swally" then we'll be having an early night in our new home - on the inflatable mattress!

Our first morning

Saturday 15 May, 2010

Well, at least we'd no cats wakening us with squeakies. Our inflatable mattress had a slow puncture, so about 3am, we wakened lying, effectively, on the floor, but wrapped in rubber and unable to turn over. Still, we were so tired, it didn't really matter. And I have built in padding anyway.

Just as I fell asleep last night, there was a burst of gunfire from the range. It took me a minute to realise that we weren't in Alloa and that there was no need to panic.

Dan and I are going back to Alloa today, so John and Linda will be left to get on with it. Until we get the sheep and hens up, we're really commuters. I'll be up on Tuesday and John and Linda are getting their furniture out of storage on Thursday, so Dan's coming up then to help. And we'll be back next weekend.

It's another sunny day - we've been sitting outside the caravan and it feels like being on holiday

Commuting

Monday 17 May, 2010

I've been up to Dalmore today, with Lorna, our daughter. She has special needs and will be going to a lovely day centre in Arbroath after she leaves school in June. She got to see her new bedroom - and stairs are a bit of a novelty. John and Linda have been working away, sorting stuff out - I think they're on first name terms with the guys at the skip site. Until we get the trailer, we're packing the car for every trip, so this morning I brought up the petrol lawnmower and some other bits and pieces.

The weather is still fabulous and it still feels like being on holiday. John and Linda have a routine where they work from 6am until 2pm then have the rest of the day off - this is self-imposed by the way, not at our request!

The dogs are loving it but are exhausted - the flags on the range were down yesterday, so John and Linda took them down to the lighthouses on Buddon Ness. Hopefully, we'll get down there soon too.

Workies

Thursday 20 May, 2010

Dan and Mark, and Ben, who's 15, were at Dalmore today helping John get the furniture out of storage. They fancy themselves as "workies" in the white van but they're more Crane brothers than Mitchell brothers. When they should have been eating rolls on square sausage, Mark was sharing some dried prunes. With a little fork. So Niles! They did get loads done though. The workshop is now empty, cleaned and secure, so all the furniture is in there. John and Linda have cleaned out the greenhouse and started digging the walled garden, which will be our temporary vegetable garden. John says it's a pleasure to weed - the soil is very light, so I suspect a good dose of organic matter will be required in the autumn. He's got the maincrop potatoes in already.

Dan brought the van down here, and he, Mark and Ben have loaded up the hen house - which has been pressure washed and sprayed with Poultry Shield - and a pile of other stuff out of the garage. Heavens knows what time they'll get finished unloading.

Just as well they've got the prunes to keep them going. So to speak.

Tidy, tidy

Saturday 22 May, 2010

Well, Dan and I are up at Dalmore again, boots loaded up with pots and plants. And dogs. Happily, our two and John and Linda's two are getting on rather well. Tess is the grumpiest - no surprise there then - but even she's coming round. She's a bit scared of Kimi, but Kimi is so easygoing, she just ignores Tess's shenanigans. Fillan's just bonkers and as long as he can run, he's happy. We've now got tomatoes and cucumber in the greenhouse and peas, beans and courgettes ready to plant out in the vegetable garden. Yesterday, Dan and I walked the fences again, taking notes of what needs to be done. We've decided to focus on the paddock for the hens and the two acre field, where we'll put the sheep initially. Today, Dan's been pulling out old fencing, ready for John to repair it next week.

I've been working along the west range. The looseboxes are now emptied and swept. There's some stuff to come out of the roof space which will help the ventilation, but I don't "do" ladders. I was accompanied by swallows, so we'll have to be careful not to disturb their nests. The boxes are large and in good condition - if a little high for a Shetland. I don't envisage them being in much though. The concrete floor needs a wee bit of attention but that can wait.

The byre is also emptied. There's room for six cows - the old neck chains are still on some of the stalls. Emptying the looseboxes and byre meant more skip runs and an increase in "stuff" in the cart shed - at least it's moving in the right direction, though. Out. We've abandoned the inflatable mattress in preference for a real one and we had a much better night's sleep. Our other job for this weekend (!) is to make a detailed list of what we want done in the house, for our builder.

The weather's still fabulous - some rain at night but glorious days. i wonder if it's always like this in Barry.

Siting the hen house

Sunday 23 May, 2010

There are three small paddocks at Dalmore. The hen house is going in one of them. After much deliberation, we've decided to upgrade the fencing on one, for now, to poultry proof stock netting, so that the chooks are a bit restricted in where they go. The vegetable garden is quite far away, in poultry terms and will be rabbit netted around the perimeter, but we think this is the best idea for now. To do this, we're dividing the largest of the three paddocks into two, which makes them all roughly the same size, maybe 1/2 acre each (that's a guess, for now). We'll put water in the four and gates between and rotate the sheep round them too.

So the house base is in place and I've sprayed again with Poultry Shield - there's an odd mite or two, but far fewer than before. Linda's going to give it a coat of clear wood preservative before John reassembles it. It's on skids, so we will be able to move it round the paddocks if we want to.

There's a ready-made sand dust bath - all natural - near the house and I noticed a wooden sand rake in one of the sheds, so we'll be able to rake it every day to keep it tidy. I'm really looking forward to getting the hens up - must get an "Eggs for sale" sign for the road end!

Lists and lists

Sunday 23 May, 2010

Dan's taken over my role as chief list maker! I came home to Alloa yesterday to see to hens, sheep, horse and cats - Dan is still at Dalmore as we have a heating engineer coming today. Before I left, I was given a "To Do" list - to add to my own list and the RHET list.

The cats must have missed me - Bertie brought me a dead bunny at 11.30pm, just as I fell asleep. I insisted that he wasn't eating it under the bed and a tug of war ensued with me holding the rabbit's back feet and Bertie gripping the head for dear life and growling at me. In the end, I picked Bertie up by the scruff and put both of them out the back door. However, this morning, he'd left me the skin in the living room. Yeuch.

Poultry flitting

Sunday 23 May, 2010

Well, the hens have been moved to Dalmore this weekend (21st May). The house has been rebuild, painted, sprayed and puffed and been given a new Onduline roof - hopefully this will fox the red mite, as well as improving the ventilation. John built a temporary run for them until we get the fencing in the paddock done. Dan brought the hens up on Friday night. He had to wait until they went to bed about 10pm before he could box them for travelling. The last one went in the new house about 1.30am! Naturally, I slept through all this.

On Saturday morning, it became apparent that they didn't understand that they were meant to stay INSIDE the fence. We spent a few fraught hours herding them back in, but by evening the Black Rocks and the Warrens had decided to stay put. Snowy, the White Leghorn, remains to be convinced.

Today (Sunday), she's still getting out - we know not how - but the rest have settled in fine. Sheep next!

Paddock Paradise 2

Sunday 23 May, 2010

Dan walked the perimeter of the 5 acre field today with the GPS - it's 600 metres long. So roughly three circuits will be a mile - sorry to mix metric and imperial - a few of those a day should do Smokey no harm at all! Or Buggy. I have to get down to some serious planning now. We cleaned out the field shelter on Saturday and the fencing is in reasonable order. The biggest problem is the grass, of which there is too much, and the location of the water.

Little things mean a lot

Tuesday 25 May, 2010

I had a brief visit to Dalmore today. My contribution was painting the garden gate - not much but it was rather tatty. Really NOT in keeping. It's a nice gate, actually, in cast iron. It was a bit rusty and pale blue - an hour, a wire brush and some Hammerite and it's a lovely dark green. Actually, I've still got a wee bit to do next time I go up, so that's on "the list". I met another of our neighbours, which was nice - and she was lovely. And we were treated to a close-up view of a Chinook helicopter as it came in to land at Barry Buddon, perhaps from RM Condor. I don't know what our horses and other livestock are going to make of this!

Shearing

Saturday 29 May, 2010

Our sheep were shorn last night. We have a lovely bloke called Duncan who shears them - pity he doesn't go as far as Angus. Last year we had three to do, this year there were twelve, although four were Carol's Ryeland x Shetlands. However, Carol's seem to have inherited the Ryeland fleece!

I could hear Duncan muttering under his breath things like "Never seen as much bloody wool on a sheep", but he soldiered on. There were a couple of nicks but nothing serious and within ten minutes, they were all grazing. The lambs are the funniest because they don't recognize their mothers.

History of Dalmore

When we bought Dalmore, we decided it would be interesting to do some research into the history of the house. Given our current circumstances, we asked Angus Council's Archives Service to do a search of the Valuation Rolls and we got the report back last week. We also bought some old OS maps of the area. The first mention of Dalmore Farm and House is in the 1889/90 Valuation Roll, when it was owned by The Right Honourable Earl of Dalhousie of the Panmure Estate, per John Sheill, Brechin and the the tenant is listed as Robert Findlay, farmer. By 1893/94, the farm was listed as part of the Pitskelly Estate, owned by the Earl of Dalhousie, and Robert Findlay was now listed a a market gardener.

This remains pretty constant until the 1921/22 Valuation Roll, when ownership was listed as The Right Hon. Earl of Dalhousie of the Panmure Estate per R.R. Webster Baillie, Panmure Estates Office, Carnoustie and the tenant as Finlay McLaren, The Nook, Barry. By 1953/54, Dalmore Farm (part of) and house is owned and occupied by Finlay McLaren. From 1958/59, the owner occupier was Mrs Mary McLaren and by 1962/63, it was owned and occupied by Lt. Col. Ian McLaren. Lt. Col. Ian McLaren owned and occupied Dalmore Farmhouse and Dalmore Bothy in 1966. Our next step will be to look for the 1953 sale of the property in the Registers of Sasine, at the National Archives of Scotland and in the Census records.

3. Diary: Ten Years On

Rosemary Champion's diary for May 2020.

Monday 4th May

So, the cattle are out and very happy they are too. Blizzard is lame again but I can't do anything about it now: once Rosie and Annie have calved, I'll get the trimmer along to do their feet and hopefully the vet to see Blizzard's at the same time. Dan made up his comfrey orders - it's quite a considerable task every week, but we're not complaining. He's also been germinating peas on damp kitchen roll - definitely the way to do it. I sowed some in pots and had rubbish germination. He's going to do the runners the same way, for the same reason. I sowed more flower seed at side of West Range. Cattle out so ponies in the barn.



Tuesday 5th May



Slight frost this morning then warm and sunny, but with a cool wind if you are out of the shelter of buildings. Baked a Dundee cake; it was a bit dry and slightly overcooked but it'll be fine with a cup of tea. Made a start on mucking out the barn.

Did a load of weeding. The chap who was buying all the sheep isn't able to do so now, so they're back on the market, via social media. Quite a lot of interest, thankfully. Dan started cutting the grass in the veg garden but the lawnmower broke.

A week early, Rosie calved at 9.30pm – red and white heifer. Ace is in bachelor quarters in the field shelter until after Annie calves. He was very obliging in going in - tempted by a bucket.



Rosie's calf.

Wednesday 6th May

Frosty then sunny. Rosie's calf (below) is up and about; she'll be called Alba.



And the sheep are sold - as a flock, which is nice - and for the asking price, which is nice also. Buyer wants the black tup lambs registered so will have to tag them tomorrow. Walked the ponies out along the cycle track. So busy.

And not to be outdone by her daughter, Annie calved - another heifer, black and white this time. A week early, by her dates, but both well.



Annie's calf

Thursday 7th May

OMG, it's hot. Annie's calf is going to be called Afton.



Rosedean Afton.

Did some gardening and walked out the ponies. Tagged and registered the three black tups; the sheep are going on the 16th May, more than likley.

Started hardening off peas and courgettes.

Friday 8th May

Cooler and rain forecast but very hot again; we had one heavy shower.

Dan was in the bees; we have two colonies, one is very strong, the second has a weak queen, so she will need to be replaced. He's done a technique called demaree on the stong hive. He may take a frame of brood from there into the poor hive to requeen it. And he planted more potatoes.

Dan repaired the milking machine.



Repairing the milking machine

The white Leghorn that lives in the green house is bloody; I think it was the cockerel, Duck. I've sprayed her with blue spray, so hopefully she'll be OK. I'm way behind with sowing but did carrots and beetroot. And some flowers for cutting; didn't have any markers so sowed them in laphabetcal order; Calendula Indian Prince, Calendula Kinglet Mixed, Cornflower, Larkspur and Scabious. Brought the cows in - well, Annie and Blizz. Rosie declined, even when offered a bucket.



Saturday 9th May

Very hot again. Rain forecast. The orchard is looking very bonny - especially the Sunset trees. Walked out the ponies, cleaned out an empty freezer, wormed and fluked the three BFL gimmers and No2 and cleaned the milking machine. The tap in Sheepfold runs a bit and I was going to ask Dan to sort it, but I was watching today and the little seepage is well used by brds and insects - including our honey bees, so maybe leave it for the summer at least.



Sheepfold water trough.

Dan repaired a leaking gutter and repaired the bird table and finished planting potatoes. We've a few seed potatoes left so I've advertised them FTGH on local Facebook pages.



First milk.

Oops, Rosie's heifer is a bull. What a rookie mistake. I really wanted a heifer and I think I just saw what I wanted to see. Then today I saw him pee. Hey ho. He's called Albie. Milked for the first time and got 10l, mostly from Annie. Rosie wasn't very co-operative. Dan's got his cheese making equipment out!

Sunday 10th May

Some rain over night but not much. Cold this morning with a bitter NE wind, but sunny. and warm if you can get out of the wind. I collected hay and popped down to East Pitkerro to check the steers. They look fine, but Charlie's very small still.

Walked out the ponies and went over the golf course for a change. Much nicer - much less busy and the ponies seemed to like it.



Euro and Tara.

Dan went strimming, mainly to tidy up along the fence between the two Top paddocks. He found a nest of eggs. Naughty girls.

Monday 11th May

Sunny, cool in the wind. The cows have decided that Ace is part of the herd again – they brought the calves round to the field shelter, so I decided they were telling me something and let him out. He was far more interested in grass than girls.

Milked Rosie and Annie then tagged the calves. We planned to ring Albie but failed to find any balls so we'll get the vet to do the job sometime, but before he gets too big. Bringing them in was a pantomime – the cows aren't liking the surface of the Triangle and raceway to the barn so that's a bit of coaxing – then the calves took off across two paddocks – tails in the air like warthogs. After their run, they trotted into

the barn no bother – not so sure they’ll be as happy to come in tomorrow. Gave the pigs their first milk – of course, they loved it. Took the ponies across the golf course then went shopping, to the bank, to the feed store and the petrol station. How exciting!

Tuesday 12th May

Happy 23rd birthday, Smokey (Munro of Millfield). We’ve been together for eighteen years, through ups and downs. To celebrate, the three ponies each had a bottle of homebrewed bitter on their breakfast. They do love beer. And we had our regular trip out to the golf course – except Euro got spooked by the sprinklers coming on and took off. But only as far as Smokey, who was grazing a few yards away. Good boy!



Birthday boy.



Ace, relaxing at milking time.

I sowed some flower seeds – Rudbeckia “Marmalade”, Zinnia “Pop Art White and Red”, Cosmos “Snow Puff” and Cosmos “Rubinato” and finished mucking out the barn. I’ll have to do the field shelter again now that Ace is free, and the byre is waiting. As I was getting ready to milk the rain came on, cold and hard. And Ace was standing at the gate to get in. Bless him. He found milking a bit tedious, so had a wee lie down.

Bertie and Pen retired to the polytunnel, out of the inclement weather. So glad they enjoy it – makes the expense worth every penny.

Wednesday 13th May

Picked up ten new POL hens in Stirling – five Sussex and five Silver Sussex, which surprisingly are black.



New hens - Sussex and the misnamed Silver Sussex.



Half the fruit garden.

The fruit garden looks well – the half that used to have raspberries but has some comfrey and potatoes. Not sure what will be in it next year – but raspberries have to go in somewhere.



And the other half.

The grass in Laing's Field is coming away but it's slow, so I'm planning to keep the cattle on our grass as long as possible.



New grass.

I've put a hay rack out for them, just in case they need it. They certainly don't go mad for hay when they come in to be milked.

Wednesday is cheesemaking day – first cheddar on the go this morning.

Thursday 14th May

On this day ten years ago, we got the keys for Dalmore. Time's a funny thing – it seems like a lifetime ago yet we've had Bryn for five years now and that just seems like a moment. Although not when he's asking to be let out / in /out/ in. We had planned to have a party on Saturday, but of course that won't happen, so we just had to drink champagne on our own.

The day was not wholly spent quaffing bubbly though. There was a lot of shit. When I got up this morning, either one dog had had a big dump or two dogs had had smaller dumps in the bathroom. Cleaned that up.

With most of our sheep going off to their new owner on Saturday, we thought we'd better tidy up their back ends. With the new grass, they were pretty dirty. Actually, they were horrible – a fine combination of wet shit and dry rattley dags.

We were shocked to find three with early stage of maggots. By that time, I had a blister on my hand and was liberally coated in shit, so Dan did the clipping. We used Spotinor and blue AB spray. The unaffected ones had a dose of Spotinor as well. I texted the shearer and he's coming on Saturday morning.



Fly struck ewe.

I had previously arranged for the cattle foot trimmer to come and trim Annie and Rosie, and for the vet to come too, to have a good look at Blizzard. Foot trimming was fine and Nik ringed Albie, the bull calf. Blizzard's problem seems to be in her hip, so the advice is not to breed from her again after she calves in October. I need to check whether we can use AI – I think it's the service by the bull that's the problem.

Anyway, we'll let Ace get Annie and Rosie back in calf, then we'll have to think about what we do next. But as a culmination of the day, and to express their disgust at being manhandled into the crush, all three cows shit on me and Rosie managed to get me a shitty tail strike across my face. I love being a smallholder.



Stackyard Ace of Spades (and a wee bit of Annie).

Friday 15th May

The three ewes are fine this morning. I've got all the paperwork done and let the two flocks in together. We shed off our eleven and put them in the barn overnight, so that they are empty for the shearer. The rest went back in the field.

Drove down to Perth to pick up fifteen meat chicks; Jane broke down at Braco, so one of the customers waiting at Perth drove down and collected the birds. Our car then failed to start – flat battery, so I had to wait for the Green Flag man to rescue me. Got home at 7.30pm. All but one of the chicks look fine. We'll see in the morning.

The green henhouse, where the new hens are, has proved a bit crowded, so Dan made some additional perches – happy hens tonight.



New perch.

Saturday 16th May

The weak chick was dead this morning, but the rest are fine. Shearer arrived at 9am, set up and all done and dusted by 10am. It was interesting to see the difference between the milking and unbred ewes. Kit and Niamh look pretty rough; Scoot, Bambi and Molly (previously No2) are shorn like a hot knife through butter. The BFL look like deer. The fleece hadn't risen but with the cases of strike, we felt we had to shear, because we can't use chemical insecticide and send the fleece for processing. It's very difficult.



Scoot, shorn.



Three Bluefaced Leicesters and one Ryeland.

The rest of the sheep – all 21 – were collected at 10.30am. Was I sad to see them go? Yes, and no – but I know it was the right decision. Although Alistair, the shearer, reckons we'll have more sheep. And who knows.

The milking machine isn't keeping pressure – Dan has thankfully found the fault (a crack in the lid of the dump bucket. It's taped up for now but we'll have to contact Tim Gibson and see if we can get a replacement. Annie and Rosie haven't been very happy, so hopefully the repair will improve things.

Dan and I weeded the polytunnel ready for the tomatoes; the spuds and peas are almost ready to eat and all my little lavender plants look like they have taken.



Peas and spuds in the polytunnel.



Sweetpeas (and weeds).

Sunday 17th May

Wakened to loads of black smoke in Barry - there was a shed of rubbish on fire up past the village. Apparently it's a regular thing. Who'd have think that there would be arsonists about in Barry at 5am on a Sunday.



Fire! But where's my breakfast?

Managed to get the ponies out for a walk today then weeded and weeded in the polytunnel; top dressed with REMIN and we're ready for the tomatoes!

Had our best milking so far this season – very relaxed for all concerned. When it goes like that, it's such a pleasure.

After making a pile of pea supports, Dan started topping Laing's Field again; giving those rushes a hammering is very satisfying!

Monday 18th May

We've had very welcome rain overnight and it's a bit cooler. Dan carried on topping Laing's Field. I started to plant out tomatoes in the polytunnel but didn't get it finished. Then we sat in the sun and drank wine. Because it's Monday.

Tuesday 19th May

I have become "Envelope writer in chief". Dan sells comfrey root and crowns via Dalmore Coft and my job is to address the envelopes, using my best handwriting. One customer, who phoned with a query, said how neat it was. I felt very pleased; it was like being six years old again.

We're having a sausage sale; that's basically all we have left to sell. Then I can get the big freezer turned off. Took the ponies for a walk across the golf course.

Wednesday 20th May

Wow! Hot! Dan made another cheddar; he said the milk was better this time – and he baked bread. It's SO good. He uses a variety of flours, but mostly from Scotland the Bread.

I started to plant out the courgettes and Dan started to prepare the pea bed and plant them out.



Pea bed.

I ordered a third fleece bag from the Natural Fibre Company, so I can keep the three types of fleece – Ryeland, BFL and Shetland separate. I took a bit of time cleaning them up – I'll use the dirty bits as a mulch for the pear trees, I think. My hands were so soft afterwards. Dirty, but soft.



Bluefaced Leicester fleece.

Thursday 21st May

Took the ponies out; it clouded up and there was a wee smirr of ran but it didn't come to anything. Still very hot though. Noticed a lump on Smokey's belly so had a bit of a meltdown – vet says its probably insect bites. What a relief. Started planting peas and continued with the courgettes – I don't even like courgettes much, but we'll sell any surplus. Baked gingernuts, a fruit cake – loving this boiled fruit cake recipe but struggling to get condensed milk – and chocolate and coconut mounds. The calves are pretty chilled at milking time.



Relaxing, waiting for their mums.

Friday 22nd May

Boy, oh boy. Not nice out there. Warm, but heavy rain and strong, strong winds. Dan managed to get Laing's Field topped before it hit though, so that's great.

Albie's discovered hay.



After doing my outside jobs, I retired to the office to clear a backlog of emails and to do some work on a couple of projects I've got going on.

Saturday 23rd May

No rain today – just very windy. Dan topped all our paddocks – die, rushes! Then he made an extension to the gate where the hen caravan is to try and stop the hens coming over and getting into the garden.



I had a quick recce round the freezers; we've almost nothing left to sell, but Dan wants to cure more pork, so I need to get into that freezer and see what's there. It's like painting the Forth Road Bridge; get to the end, go straight back to the beginning.

Sunday 24th May

Much less windy today – only a fair breeze, as opposed to gales – and sunny. Finished planting out the courgettes, peas and runner beans and started pulling up the bolted brassicas. The cows get them and love them. First thing, Dan put the electric fence up in Laing's Field, giving the cows access to about 15 / 20 metres in but including the line of trees and hedging, under which is loads of grass. I let them out after milking; Ace was very excited and the calves were racing around. The cows were eating.

One of Dan's bees stung me – not fair, I didn't go into their hive and mess about, but I pay the price. I have a completely over the top, hysterical reaction – it hurt but wasn't THAT bad. Dan got the stinger out, so that helped. One hive is doing really well – the one he demareed a week or so ago; the other is producing a new queen and the nuc has a lovely queen cell, so things seem to be looking up.

Dan pulled rhubarb and cooked it with some of my reject strawberry jam / syrup – I'm glad we've found a use for it as it would be no good on bread. And he finished knitting my waistcoat with our yarn - I LOVE IT!



Cattle on new grass.



Annie, getting stuck in.



Blocked waistcoat

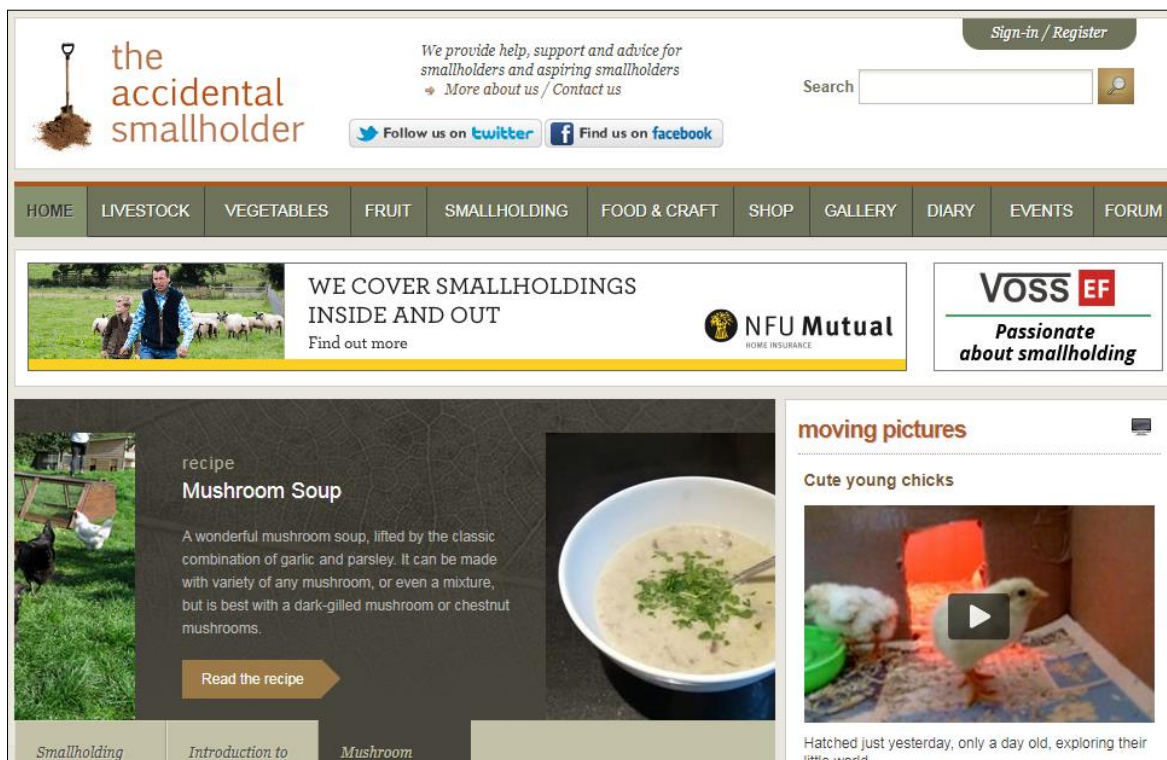
Saw THE RAT in the feed store. I nearly had a bloody heart attack. I thought I'd got it with the bait but apparently not, so the humane trap is out baited with peanut butter. Fingers crossed.



Fenceline trimmed.

4. The Accidental Smallholder

The Accidental Smallholder website was started by Rosemary Champion to help other people who are interested in smallholding to find their way, and to share her experiences.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Accidental Smallholder website. At the top, there is a logo for 'the accidental smallholder' featuring a shovel and soil. To the right of the logo, the text reads: 'We provide help, support and advice for smallholders and aspiring smallholders' and 'More about us / Contact us'. There is a search bar and a 'Sign-in / Register' button. Below the logo, there are social media links for Twitter and Facebook. A navigation menu includes: HOME, LIVESTOCK, VEGETABLES, FRUIT, SMALLHOLDING, FOOD & CRAFT, SHOP, GALLERY, DIARY, EVENTS, FORUM. Below the navigation menu, there are three main sections: 1. A banner for 'WE COVER SMALLHOLDINGS INSIDE AND OUT' with a photo of a man and sheep, and a 'Find out more' link. 2. A banner for 'NFU Mutual HOME INSURANCE' with the logo. 3. A banner for 'VOSS EF Passionate about smallholding'. Below these banners, there are two main content areas: 1. A recipe section for 'Mushroom Soup' with a photo of a bowl of soup and a 'Read the recipe' button. 2. A 'moving pictures' section titled 'Cute young chicks' with a video player showing chicks and a caption: 'Hatched just yesterday, only a day old, exploring their little world'.

Home page of the Accidental Smallholder website, 28.5.20.

The Accidental Smallholder website is at www.accidentalsmallholder.net. It receives over 60,000 visitors a month, contains numerous useful articles about setting up and running a smallholding, together with information on resources and events. As an example, the article on Poultry Food and Drink is reproduced below:

Poultry Food and Drink

In the "olden days", hens may have been fed on scraps, but if you want decent egg production, you must feed a good, balanced diet. For most of us, that means a proprietary feed. As with houses, there are lots of poultry feeds on the market, many aimed specifically at smallholders.

Organic and GM-free feeds are available, and a layer pellet containing the poultry wormer "Flubenvet" has recently become available.

Pellets and mash

Layer pellets are easiest to feed, either from a hopper or scattered on the ground. However, feeding on the ground can be wasteful and encourage vermin and wild birds if not all cleared up; with a hopper, feed can be available on an ad-lib basis and, if you place it in a sheltered area, it is protected from weather and wild birds.

Layer mash, which is basically powdered pellets, is also available but it tends to get damp, sour and lumpy. Mash is usually fed in intensive systems so that the hens take longer to feed and have less time for unsavoury pursuits such as feather pecking.



Grit and feed hoppers

Layer pellets should only be fed to birds that are in lay – the pellets are supplemented with calcium, an excess of which can result in kidney failure.

Corn for hens

You can also feed corn (wheat) as a treat, at about 25g per hen per day, and preferably in the evening. If you think of the layers pellets as being the "meat and two veg" and the corn as the "chocolate mousse", you get the idea - the corn should be a treat.

Feeding it in the evening encourages the wanderers to head back to the henhouse and it means that they go to roost with a full crop, keeping them content during the night. If you offer corn in the morning, the hens will ignore the nutritionally balanced but boring pellets! Too much corn makes hens fat, and fat hens are unhealthy and less likely to lay well.

Keep all feed in rodent-proof containers and take feed hoppers in at night to discourage unwelcome visitors.

Other food for hens

Your hens will also have a varied diet of seeds, slugs, snails, worms, bugs and grass. Eating long grass can cause problems for poultry by becoming impacted in the crop, so try to keep them on short grass if possible.

If your hens don't have access to much grass, give them greens such as lettuce, cabbage and sprouts, including the stems, and carrots. Hang them up so that they don't waste them. A corn cob is always well received as are sunflower seeds, on or off the plant; if you grow sunflowers, let them seed then hang the seed-heads up for your hens.

Meat products and catering waste i.e. food that has been through a kitchen must NEVER be fed to poultry because of the risk of disease.

We were told to try to get them to take oil while they were moulting to help with feather regrowth, so we hit on the idea of sardines in sunflower oil. We mix the sardines with wholemeal bread to sop up all the juices. However, this is fed once a week as a treat.

Poultry grit

Poultry also need access to grit and tiny stones, to aid digestion; hens have no teeth so the grit lies in the crop and helps grind up the hens' food. Free-range hens will access these naturally, but it's best to offer some mixed with oyster shell.

Layer pellets already contain calcium for shell formation, but additional oyster shell can be offered, either on its own or as part of mixed grit. Grit can be fed from a hopper or from a flowerpot saucer or similar.

Water for poultry

Poultry must always have access to fresh, clean water and they drink a surprising amount of water, especially on hot days. Drinkers made from plastic, galvanised metal or glass (not a great idea!) are available but hens seem equally happy drinking from puddles, the birdbath, the sheep trough or just about any 'natural' source. However, the blue-green algae which forms on stagnant water can be fatal, so keep hens away from it.

In extreme weather conditions, either hot or cold, water may need attention several times a day. Hens don't like hot water, so in icy weather, you will have to break the ice during the day. Empty drinkers at night, so that they don't freeze solid by morning – better than spending ten minutes in the morning trying to break them open.

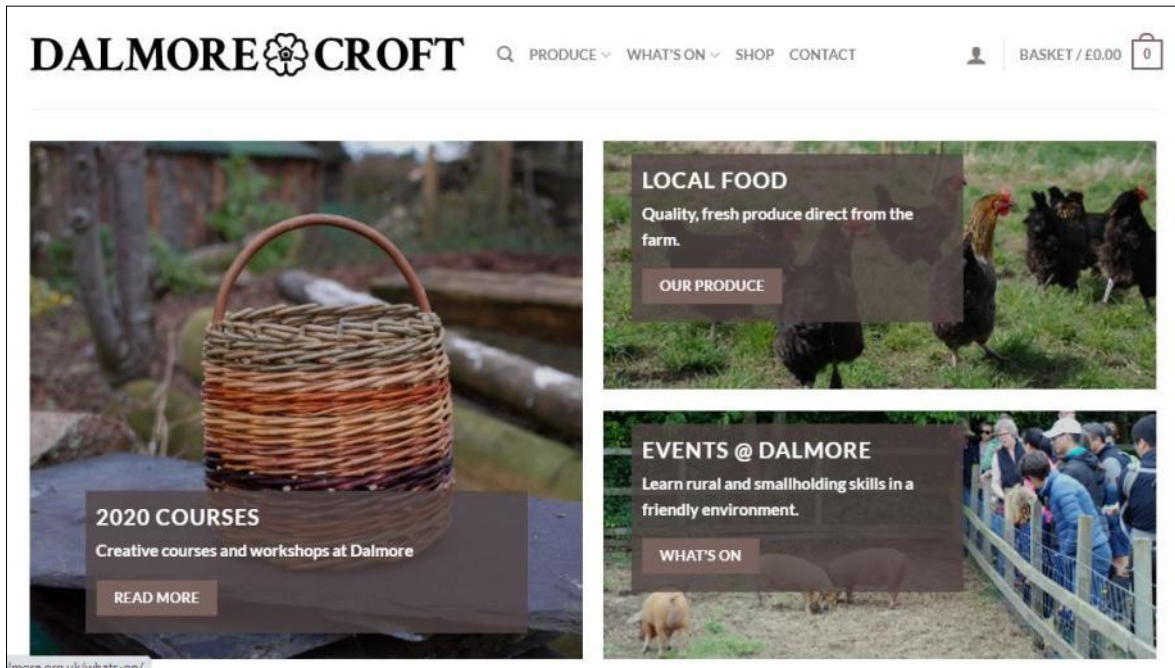


Keep water feeders topped-up at all times

Adding garlic to the water is supposed to reduce worm infestations and cider vinegar can be added as a general tonic. Cider vinegar works by making the gut acid, which bacteria and most intestinal parasites cannot tolerate – use 10ml of vinegar / 500ml of water BUT only use cider vinegar in non- galvanised containers as the acid attacks and dissolves the zinc in galvanised containers, which then poisons the hens.

There are two other related websites: Dalmore Croft, and Rosedean Ryelands.

Dalmore Croft



Home page of the Dalmore Croft website at 28.5.20.

Here, as a taster, is the section on Eggs from the Dalmore Croft website:

EGGS

We've been selling eggs from our free range hens since 2003. Because of their varied, natural diet, our hens produce eggs with bright, plump yolks, and whites that 'stand'; they have excellent flavour. They are ideal for all culinary purposes.

Buying eggs

Eggs can be bought from our honesty box located at the entrance to Dalmore. Eggs cost:

- **1/2 dozen free-range hens eggs – £1.70**
- **1 dozen pullet eggs – £2.00** (subject to availability)

If the honesty box isn't there, or you fancy a blether, come to the house and we'll probably have some available there.

If you wish to place a regular order please contact us or come to the house and we will put eggs aside for you each week.

About our laying hens

We keep around 100 hens in three small flocks. We replace one flock each spring. The two youngest flocks each has its own house plus three paddocks, planted with apple trees and herbaceous plants. The hens move to a new paddock every month, so they can access fresh, clean grass. Each hen has approximately 30m² of outdoor space.



Our free range hens

Our eggs are not graded – most would be classed as large or extra large. Every year around May/June we have pullet eggs for sale – these are the smaller eggs from young hens who have just started laying. The eggs are sold in boxes of six, and may vary in shell colour – we have breeds that lay white, light brown, dark brown, and blue/green eggs. The oldest hens free range across our fields from their home in a converted caravan. The hens have adlib access to a layer pellet plus a “treat” of mixed corn in the afternoon – plus, of course, grass and seeds and bugs that they find as they scratch around.

Our hens are mostly Rhode Rocks, with a scattering of other types – Hyline, Marans, White Leghorns. Eggs are collected every day and prepared for sale. Although we advise customers to eat within three weeks, the eggs we sell are rarely more than two or three days old.

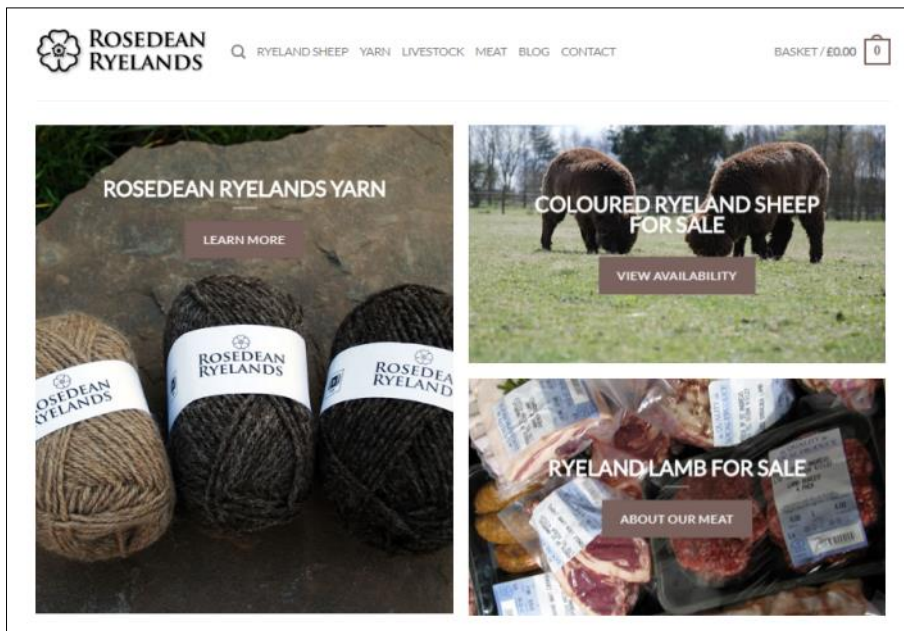
Rosedean Ryelands Sheep

Rosemary and Dan established their flock of pedigree Coloured Ryelands sheep in 2007. Their Rosedean Ryelands website at www.rosedeanryelands.co.uk describes the flock, and explains how their wool is processing and how it can be bought. The following is from the introductory section of the website.

The Ryeland breed of sheep is one of the oldest in Britain, originating around Hereford. The breed is governed by the Ryeland Flock Book Society. Constitutional changes made in 2010 gave Coloured Ryelands the same status as white Ryelands and their own Flock Book.

Although once a thriving and popular breed, its popularity declined after the Second World War. By 1974, only 980 breeding ewes remained, causing it to be listed as “rare” by the newly formed Rare Breeds Survival Trust. Since then, numbers have risen sufficiently for the breed to be reclassified as a native breed rather than a rare breed.

Although the number of flocks has risen significantly, the average flock size is much smaller than previously, indicating the Ryeland’s popularity as a smallholder’s or “hobby” sheep.



Home page of the Roseland Ryelands website at 28.5.20.

Ryelands are popular with smallholders and new sheep-keepers because they

- are small sheep, docile and easy to handle.
- will produce a prime butcher's lamb off grass. Lambs will finish at around 45kg liveweight at around six months of age.
- produce a top quality fleece, ideal for hand spinning and craftwork. An average fleece will weigh around 2.25 – 3kg, with a staple length of 8-10cm and a Bradford Count of 56 – 58.
- are adaptable to a range of conditions and suited to organic systems.



The flock of Roseland Ryedale sheep.

Coloured Ryelands became more popular in the 1980s. Although the wool from white animals has always been more valuable for sale, coloured fleece is popular

with hand spinners and craft workers and comes in a range of colours from pale cream / grey to dark chocolate brown.

Since 2010, Coloured Ryelands have had their own flock book; all coloured sheep are registered there plus any sheep with a coloured parent, even if the sheep itself has a white fleece.

