

## **RED POLL BEEF E-NEWS AUGUST 2011**

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### Local Produce Fair & Fresh Beef

The next local produce fair takes place on the Saturday of the bank holiday weekend, 27th August from 10:00 to 14:00. There will be fresh Red Poll beef on offer and much more besides, so please come along and stock up on a great range of locally produced food at competitive prices. At the September 24th local produce fair you can come and find out all about the work of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust which is extremely active in this area through the Gowy and Mersey Washlands Living Landscapes Project.

### Heritage Open Days

Heritage Open Days this year are on 8th - 11th September, when a huge variety of buildings will be open which are not normally accessible for a variety of reasons, and all for free. Each day we are offering a guided tour of the 18th century Mickle Trafford water mill at 11:00 lasting about an hour and a half, and a guided farm tour packed with local history at 14:00 which lasts around two hours, and includes the newly restored main farm building, the core of which dates back to about 1790. You can book to come on either or both tours and if you would like to make a day of it you can have lunch at the Shrewsbury Arms or the Nags Head, or bring a picnic lunch to eat outside or in our meeting room where tea and coffee will be provided. Numbers are strictly limited for the mill tour, and booking is essential (contact details are above). All tours start from the farm yard where there is ample parking space and cycle storage, and the farm is on a bus route with a half hourly service (hourly on Sundays). I can provide you with bus times on a summary sheet should you need them. For information about other events please visit [www.heritageopendayschester.co.uk](http://www.heritageopendayschester.co.uk)

### Red Polls

The cattle are spreading further afield as the summer progresses. Pint Pot (our big, black ox) and the bullocks (castrated males) can be seen on the fields between the A56 and the railway bridge in Plemstall Lane, together with Frodo and Twoby, who will be the next breeding bulls. The cows and calves with Ernie the Bull can be seen from the public footpath behind the farm. And following a pleasant afternoon spent with Ray Bowler, the secretary of the Red Poll Cattle Society, both Bernie the Bull and Frodo are now registered as full pedigree animals, although it doesn't seem to have gone to their heads. Most of the cows have given birth to calves, although there should be another ten still to come before the autumn.

### Barley & Crop Rotation

The barley is now due to be harvested. You can see it growing in the first two fields on Picton Lane and The Street, and may have noticed that it contains considerably more weeds than conventionally grown arable crops. This means that less grain is produced per acre, which could be deemed to be inefficient by some. However, the crop actually performs three other functions as well as producing grain for food production. The straw (stems of the crop) is baled and is used for bedding for the Red Polls in winter, and the stubble is left through the winter providing an important source of feed for birds during the lean months. Finally, the stubble is grazed by some of the Red Polls in early spring, providing food them in March. The barley and pollen & nectar mix (grown for bees) and wild bird mix (winter bird habitat and feed) are grown on a two yearly rotation, and are due to be moved in spring 2012. Because the barley takes so much nutrition from the soil, it is followed by pollen & nectar mix containing clover which replaces some of the

nitrogen used by the barley. But since we grow only 5 acres of pollen & nectar mix and 10 acres of barley, I am investigating following the remainder of the barley with a green manure crop which would replenish the soil and provide food for the cattle.

### Trees

This winter we will be carrying out more work on the Gowy meadows to manage the land for the birds to which it is home. This will include coppicing the extremely large willow trees which are prominent in the view upstream from Trafford Bridge. The trees will be cut to a low height which will open up that field to encourage ground nesting wading birds, especially Peewits (Lapwings), which are currently deterred from using this field and which need open ground on which to nest. We will also attempt to reduce the numbers of corvids, especially crows, which are a major cause of chick loss through predation. The poplar plantations are also due to be thinned by the Poplar Tree Company shortly. Two thirds of the trees will be felled and taken for processing into kiln-dried firewood, allowing the remaining trees to reach maturity. You may have noticed how crowded the trees are looking in the plantation on the permissive footpath behind Meadow Fishery.

*Huw Rowlands*  
*21/08/2011*