

Rural News

Jackie Lowe, Synod Rural Link, gives a flavour of life in the Chalke Valley, near Salisbury

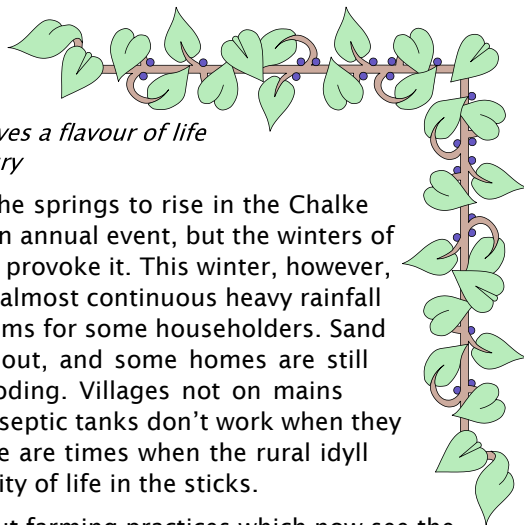
Heavy rain this winter caused the springs to rise in the Chalke Valley once again. It's usually an annual event, but the winters of 2004 and 2005 were too dry to provoke it. This winter, however, waterlogged land and spells of almost continuous heavy rainfall have led to considerable problems for some householders. Sand bags have not kept the water out, and some homes are still drying out six weeks after flooding. Villages not on mains drainage suffer particularly, as septic tanks don't work when they fill up with ground water. There are times when the rural idyll seems a long way from the reality of life in the sticks.

Questions are being asked about farming practices which now see the cultivation of great swathes of hillsides leading to 'run-off' flooding. Incursion of water into houses is not the only long term problem. Paths and gardens can be buried under mud and stones when the waters recede.

It may not be all good news in the countryside, but it's not all bad news either. In the garden of one cottage which had been flooded for weeks to a depth well over wellington height, snowdrops and aconites were cheerfully pushing up around the chalky spoil left behind. And the elderly widow living there was doing her best to match their optimism, despite the fact that the local farmer seems to be ignoring pleas from many locals for some land to be maintained as 'set-aside' in order to decrease the possibility of repeat flooding.

Life is difficult for farmers, too. With income from agriculture no longer assured, some have taken to offering Farm Bed and Breakfast holidays to augment depleted funds. Others are breeding birds for the guns, and are able to make far more money offering corporate facilities for shoots than they ever could from raising other livestock. Some arable farmers are beginning to look at working co-operatively, but the resulting mergers have meant loss of employment for the labour force. Locally, two people who have each worked on the same farm for over twenty years were told that one of them would have to go. They have yet to find out which of them it will be.

Meanwhile, on a happier note, our village Palm Sunday procession, with donkeys, went from the United Reformed Church to the Parish Church. We knew it should be only the one donkey, but neither will come out of the field without the other. If only farm workers could be afforded the same consideration!



Pictures on Paper

(Reflections from a recent URC visit to Zambia)

It is raining yet there is no water, not at home anyway.

A young girl, a heavy wheel barrow, containers full of water an uphill journey.

Sketch it in your mind — the struggle for life's essentials is real.

A group of children laughing and smiling, waving at the white faced man, taken by surprise.

There are nine and only three have shoes.

Life's struggle in its beginning is in labour room where the care is professional and dedicated.

No running water and no easy access to a toilet or a shower.

Little medication and no nearby hospital not the place for a frightened young mum.

Parliament, shiny, no shortage of 4x4s or air conditioning, suits or hot air.

Eric Massey