

Farm Visit



Farnell Farm, Rolvenden

A long way from City Life

Originally from London, with careers in the media, Barry and Karin Craddock wanted a change of pace.

“London in the Summer is dreadful and we used to escape to the countryside for three months of the year to avoid it. After years of holidaying in Yorkshire, and feeling that a change of lifestyle and pace was needed we bought a renovation project in Yorkshire. The reality was a complete rebuild and during the project it became more apparent that the distance to London to work was too great.

Before the days of on-line property sites, we selected areas that were commutable to London and subscribed to local papers. After a long and fruitless search for a property with land to provide an active retirement, we stumbled upon a classified advert for Farnell Farm. The moment we laid eyes on the place, we fell in love with it. We are both very visual people and Farnell Farm is quite beautiful.”



With the sale of their London home in 1999, and providing them with both the farm and a small house in nearby Cranbrook, the move was made. The farm itself is 170 acres and a mixture of arable land woodland and pasture. Originally a local farmer rented the arable land from them but recession and low prices to farmers for their crops left the farmer bankrupt and so the Craddocks took to farming the land themselves. A mammoth undertaking for anyone but without experience, it is a big ask. They now work the land in partnership with another local farmer and the arable side of the farm is taken care of.

So to cobnuts, wool and wild flower seeds!

As they settled in on the land, so they have discovered more about their parcel of tranquillity. An Edwardian pond in need of full restoration has been painstakingly brought back to life, a small flock of Port-



land sheep graze the 15 acres of pasture, and provide fleeces, batts and worsted wool suitable for knitting or weaving. And from the 75 acres of woodland Karin has taken the inkling of an idea and provided a service and delight to all. Full of Bluebells in the Spring the couple are one of only a handful of establishment licensed to harvest, store and sell wild flower seeds. With training from the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakefield Place, the seeds are dried to specific moisture content levels to ensure longevity. And are sealed in foil. From the Bluebell seeds came the idea to harvest the other wild flower seeds growing in the woods and they now provide Garlic, Wild Broom, Foxglove and Devils-Bit Scabious seeds.

Between 1999 and 2000 the couple, with the help of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, planted 600 trees of Lambert's Filbert the true Kentish Cobnuts. The trees are planted in a traditional quinox pattern in a four acre field, traditionally called Plats. Grown without the use of pesticides, fertilizers or chemical sprays. A wonderful workforce of ladybirds and pheasants, help keep the pests under control.

About 7% of the trees are another variety of Cobnut called Gunselbert, which originated in Germany and is also created from the wild hazelnut. Closer in appearance to the Hazelnut, it retains the same round shape. The Gunselbert nuts ripen about a month later than the Lambert's Filbert and with it's long yellow catkins it is used as a pollinator for the Kentish Cobnut. The large clusters of nuts with short frilly husks have a distinctive nutty flavour all their own but they do not have the same keeping qualities as the Kentish Cobnuts. Most growers do not sell Gunselberts separately, but Barry and Karin feel that they should be appreciated in their own right.

There were times when they might have given up, for the first ten years they struggled with the land void of any buildings to store produce or equipment, battered by the weather with just a small caravan to take shelter from the elements. The addition of their lovely barn 4 years ago has made a big difference.

This year they have planted 5 acres of vines, a project encouraged by their son, who hopes to work with the vines, when he finishes his viticulture course at nearby Plumpton College. Planted with vines from France by a mixed team of Germans, Russians and of course Barry and Karin they are nurturing the mixture of Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay grapes, which should do well on the type of land and weather conditions we now experience. It will take about three years for the vines to mature, and whilst they are growing on the Craddocks are looking at the possibility of perhaps re-instating the coppice areas of the woodland!

A change of pace from their hectic London life? I am not sure, as they seem to be busy and buzzing with more and more ways to utilise Farnell Farm. As an active retirement, it seems to be more than that, as they are two of the nicest and happiest people I have come across in a long time. The land suits them and they very much suit the land.

Situated between Benenden and Rolvenden, the farm can be found on Sandhurst Lane, which is off the B2086 Cranbrook to Rolvenden Road. All their produce is available through the online shop www.farnellfarm.co.uk.

RECIPE

Farnell Farm Kentish Cobnuts with Stilton and Mushroom Brochetta

Serves 4

Prepare 10 mins - Cooking time 7mins

Ingredients

32 Kentish Cobnuts
80g Stilton
2-4 Field Mushrooms
4 Slices of interesting bread
Knob of butter
Pinch of Black Pepper, Basil, Oregano and Rosemary

Method

Lightly toast bread slices. Shell Kentish Cobnuts. Wash and slice mushrooms. Place the mushrooms and Kentish cobnuts in a frying pan with the knob of butter. Sprinkle with black pepper, basil, oregano and rosemary. Heat and gently toss for 4-5 mins until the nuts are golden brown and the mushrooms are soft. Spoon the Kentish Cobnuts and Mushroom mixture on to the toast and generously crumble the Stilton over the top. Grill until cheese melts. Serve and enjoy.



Facing Page Bottom: Barry & Karin Craddock planting the 5 acre vineyard

Facing Page Top: A branded box of Kentish Cobnuts

This Page Top: The restored Edwardian pond in winter

This Page Middle: Kent Cob trees traditionally planted in a quinox pattern

This Page Bottom: The planted vineyard

All photographs courtesy of www.farnellfarm.co.uk

