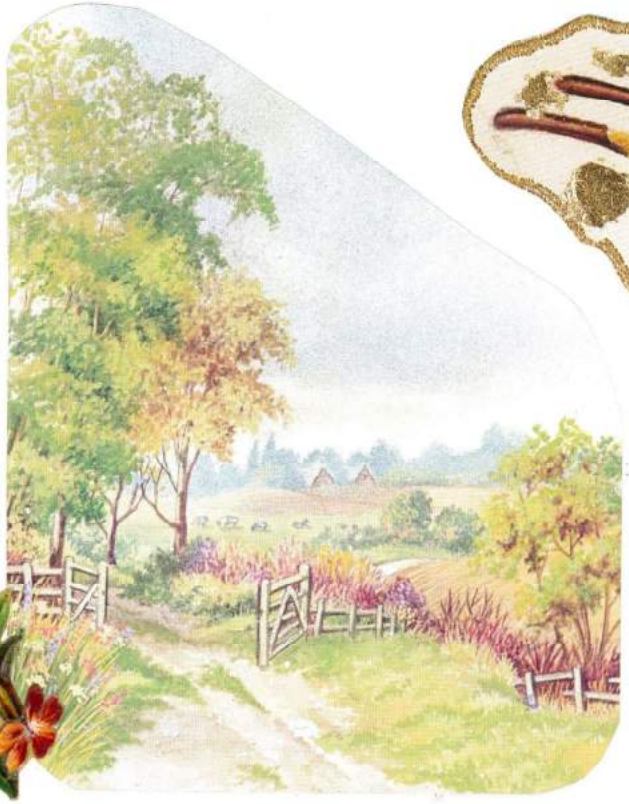
JULY



Rowed up and ready for baling

Tractors busy rowing up and bailing

Finished product

July.

If farmers are very lucky with the weather hay may be got at the very end of June but generally the first a second week of July is more usual. This can be a warm month and any wind blowing is usually great for drying the grass once it is cut. It is quite a nail biting time as it takes a few days for the grass to kill off once cut, and it does not want to be moved about till then. A light shower of rain does very little damage but it is preferable to have none at all. Once it changes colour the farmer can come in and move it about exposing what was underneath which will need another good weather day to dry it. Next day with luck it can be rowed up and all being well baled up and taken away to the farmyard. This always leaves the field looking very barren but it is not long before new green shoots appear - after three or four weeks there is a fresh bite of grass for the sheep.

There are high hedges round the paddocks at Dairy Farm - because of this and the fact that the land has been grazing meadows for many years means there are many species of birds and quite a few wild flowers - very little spraying is done here which makes it safer for wild life.

Until a few years ago there were water voles but when a neighbouring farmer decided to bring thousands of pigs into the area there were many rats which seemed to be the end of the water voles. Very sad as their numbers are dwindling everywhere.

Although there is not a pond just here toads, frogs and newts can be found regularly

and this time of year they are all different sizes as the young ones are growing up.

All the containers and hanging baskets need to be watered every morning just now and in the evening as well if the day has been particularly hot. If not kept moist the compost dries out, leaves the sides of the container and makes it very difficult to water properly. Dead heading can also be done every couple of days or so to keep plants looking fresh. This time of year the greenhouse is free of mature plants looking their best

All being well early July a few tomatoes will be starting to ripen. Picked and eaten straight away they taste absolutely delicious. The lawns are still growing fast and need regular mowing - edges trimmed and tidy A neat area of grass makes all the difference to the appearance of a place - you can get away with a slightly messy flowerbed but tidy grass is a must.

There will also be weeds to be dealt with among gravel - between flagstones etc - those never give you time to rest - as fast as you get rid of one lot some more start elsewhere - they always seems to outgrow your decent plants. That is all part of midsummer and hopefully because of the longer days more time can be spent outside doing all these jobs

Sometimes towards the very end of the month the early crops of barley are ready to be harvested and rape crops can be cut down to wait for the combine - but most of harvest is done next month.

AUGUST

The original 12 foot greenhouse

Later extended to 25 feet

Then added patio and little walls

August

This is always an exchemely busy month for farmers being the height of the harvest. Every suitable day is a dawn to dusk hard work some even waking into the night Barley is usually ready first often coinciding with the rape harvest then wheat as it comes ready There is quite a bit of borage grown locally filling the fields with its beautiful blue during the summer

The year of writing these notes was the hottest and driest for many a long year and the farmers got their crops harvested without hold ups for rain The very dry weather however made the grazing pastures more like deserts and this had the effect of having to feed animals with what should have been stored for the winter. This will have the effect of making winter feed prices rise quite substantially and perhaps some things - like hay - will be scarce and due to lack of water the potato crops may be suffering. The gardens also suffered badly - everything dried up, the leaves went crisp n fell off altogether. As water was short it was decided to water only the special plants in containers and hope the rest survived until the rains finally come

As the days went by it seemed to get hotter and hotter. Taking shoes off

to try to cool down was no good as the concrete burned the soles of the feet. Sitting outside was almost out of the question as the temperature reached the nineties on a number of days.

The dogs spent a good deal of time sleeping in a cool shady place so when evening came and a bit of cool relief it was a good time to give them a walk then.

About the middle of the month one of the cats who had been missing came home with one kitten about two weeks old. A beautiful blue grey little boy. This was obviously her idea of a present! It will not be difficult to find a home for such an attractive little animal when he is old enough.

Although the days were hot it was a good time to do some decorating. With doors and windows open all the paint soon dried. It gives great satisfaction to see fresh clean walls and laundered curtains - makes all the hard work worth while.

It is also a good time to think about ordering fuel for the boiler for the winter. It is easier to tip the load while the yard is hard and dry in the summer.

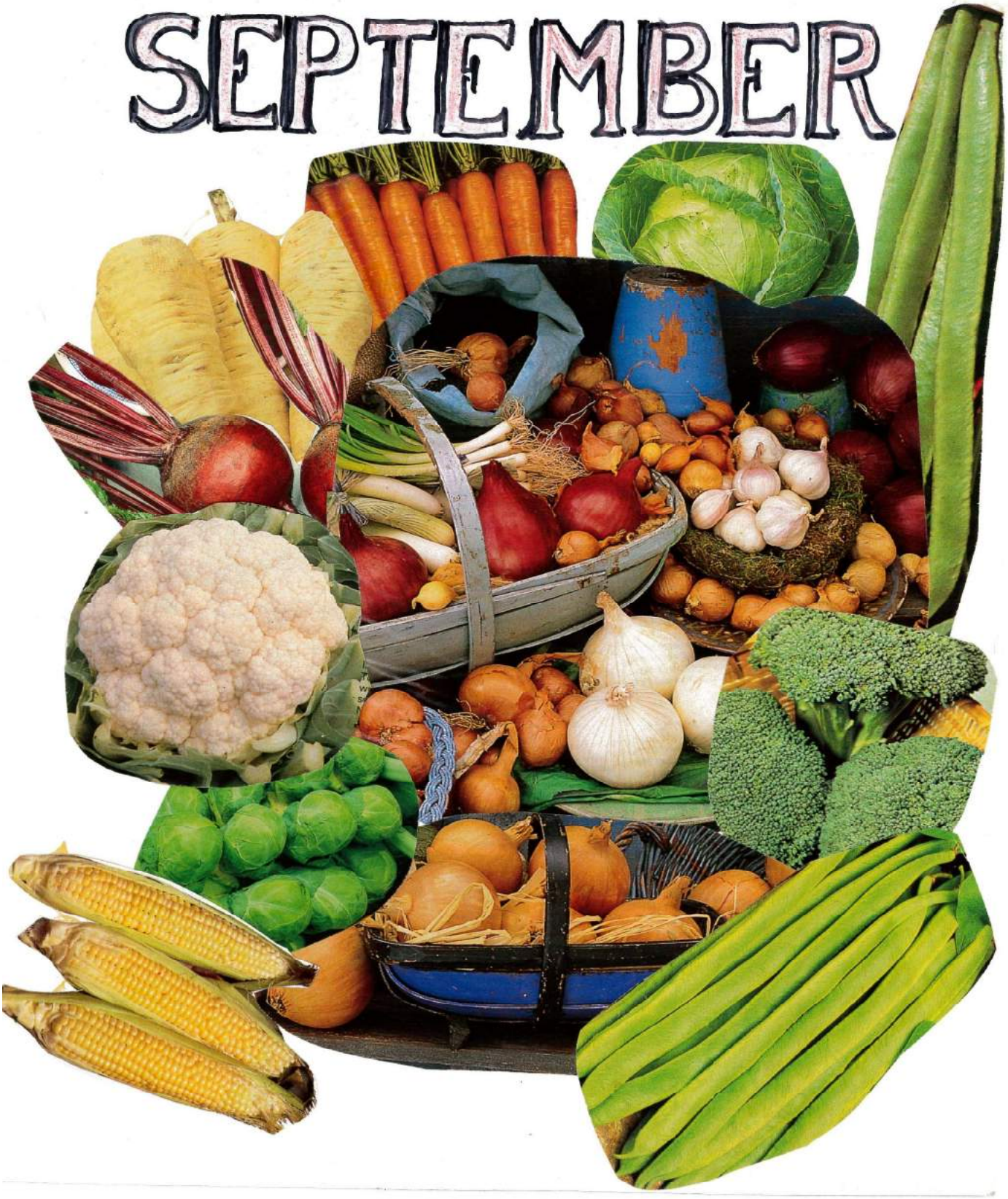
One very wet summer the lorry got stuck and skidded into a building - eventually being dragged out by a farm tractor. It took weeks for the deep ruts to disappear

The birds seem to have had a good summer The good weather seemed to produce extra insects which made it easy for our resident swallows to rear two large broods. There seemed to be a dozen young birds sitting on the electric cable which runs across to the shed where they nest each year. Although only a corrugated sheet structure this place provides a home for the swallows - wrens robins, blackbirds and sparrows

A large willow tree just inside the field always housed a family of starlings but this year has been taken over by a swarm of bees. The honey comb is in full view just inside the hole - A nosey wasp got sent packing in no uncertain terms by about a dozen irate bees!

The warm weather is a good time to take geranium cuttings as they root quite quickly then, and kept over winter in a cool but frost free greenhouse they are good little plants by the spring Being one jump ahead can have benefits as a rooted cutting will soon grow into a lovely plant once given its own space.

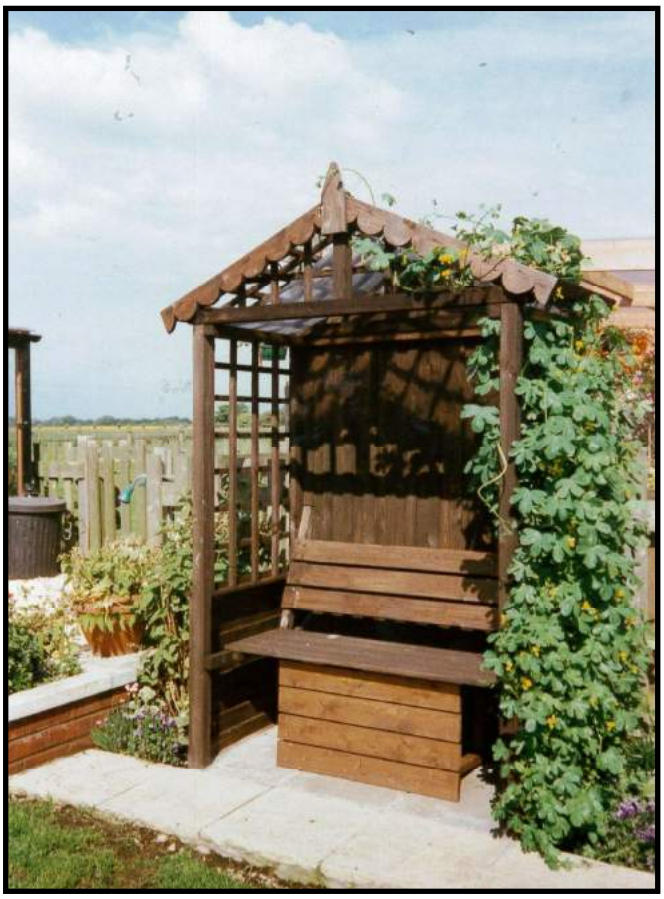
SEPTEMBER



Septic tank corner well camouflaged

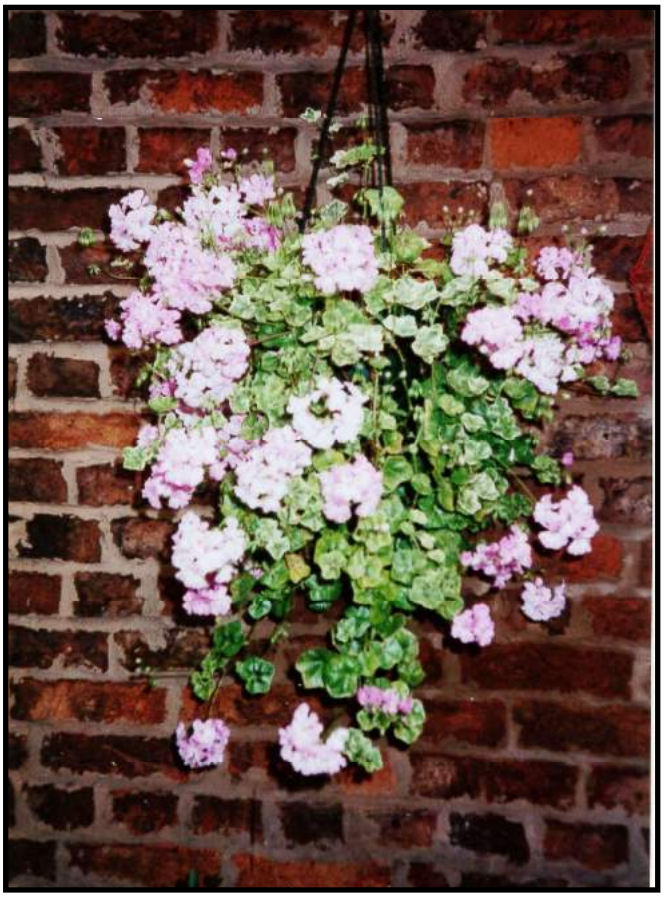
Late flowering Jackmall

Late summer colour in lean-to



Grand seat with Tropeaoleum

Self seeded wild Geranium



Pelargonium –Woods Surprise

Pelargonium –Rose Silver Cascade

Working the land after harvest

Sparrow hawk that crash landed in the barn - recovered ok

Louis & Henry who stayed for a few months while they waited to go to their new home

September.

The month of Harvest Festivals - most things have been gathered in and fields are being worked up, being planted with next years rape and some wheat and barley crops. Looking out across the land it looks quite empty, comparing it with a few weeks back when growth was so high you could not see much at all.

Although this month can have some really good sunny days it is noticeable in the evenings that it comes quite chilly, and early mornings are very often cool and a heavy dew. The lawns still need cutting but some days it is difficult as the grass stays very wet all day. Being the month where suddenly the nights become longer than the days, it feels like we are heading for winter, but hopefully there should not be frosts just yet.

Now the land around has been cleared it is possible to see the deer family again. They have a regular crossing quite early each morning, heading for the wood on a neighbouring farm. The stag always seems to lead the way with his ladies in a line behind him. Although they are quite a good way off, they are aware of humans and dogs, so stop and stare for a minute then set off at a good gallop away to the wood.

The garden can receive extra attention just now. There are always weeding and tidying jobs throughout the year but by now containers with summer plants may need a face lift. A trip to the garden centre for some winter pansies and heathers can pass a pleasant hour or so as there are always new things to look at down there. The pansies

will be lovely and colourful through the dark dreary winter months and they will last up to the time when summer plants can go out again.

The pelargonium cuttings taken during August look as if they have rooted and started to grow. It will soon be time to get them all into the sheltered lean-to greenhouse where they can be keep free of frost. Not all cuttings will have rooted and any that look sick or have rotted off need to be discarded so as not to affect the healthy ones. Also it is best to pick off any flowers or buds that may have appeared as they drain a baby plant of its energy at this stage. They need very little water during this stage of growth, just an occasional moistening of the compost without wetting the little plants themselves. They also need checking for the ever present white fly. Regularly sprayed these little nuisances can be kept under control but never seem to disappear completely.

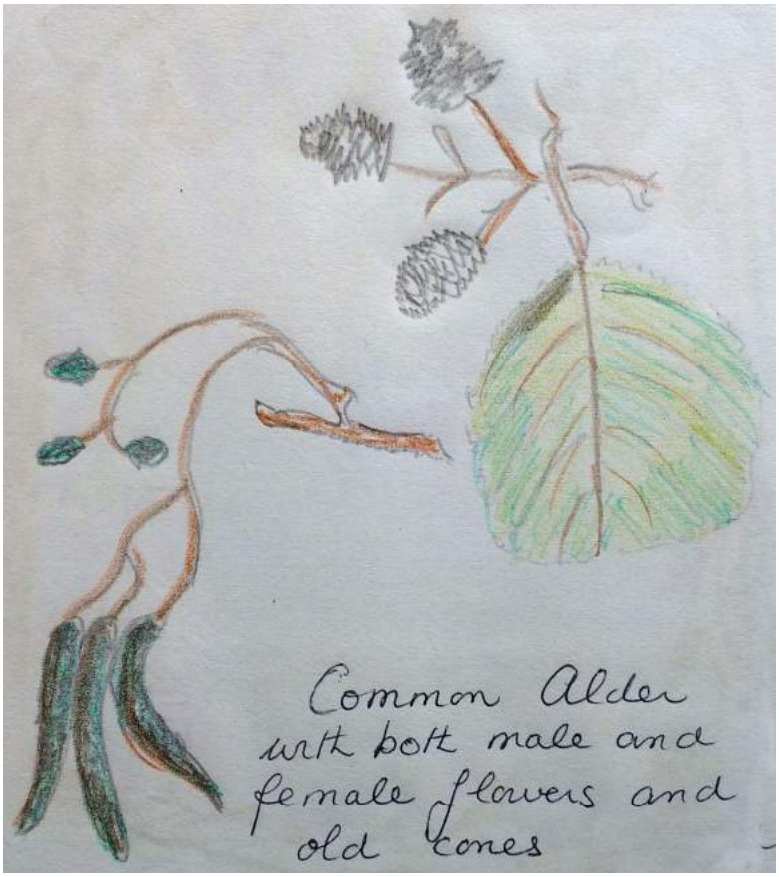
The evening walk with the dogs is now in complete darkness - Floss the sheepdog being mostly black is difficult to see at night She seems to regularly find hedgehogs wandering around the field - perhaps they are busy topping up their diet before hibernation - She never hurts them but gets very excited when she finds one.

There are also quite a few foxes about - perhaps sheltering in the maize field next door. This will be cut early next month to be used for animal feed during the winter months

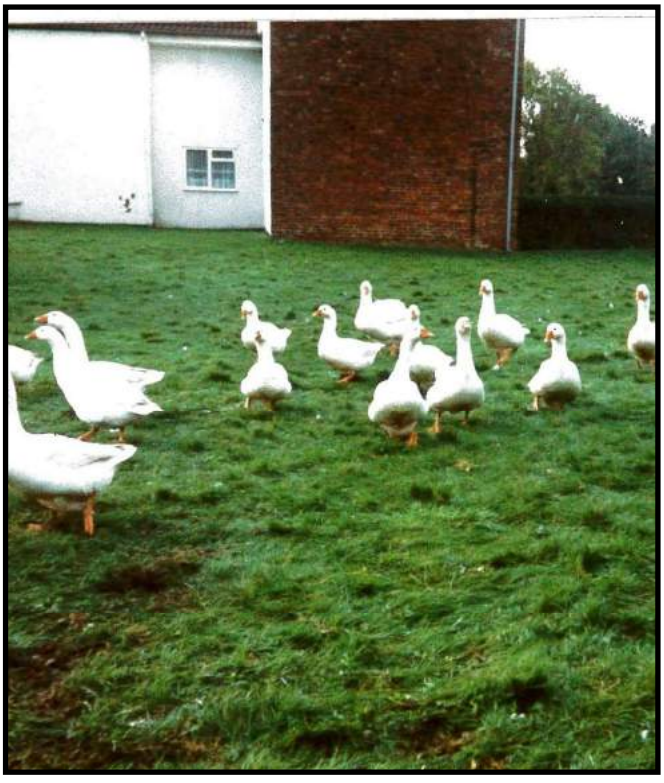
Towards the end of the month can be a time when Autumn winds can be a nuisance - Travelling in on strong weather systems from the Atlantic can wreak havoc with the already failing hanging baskets After a windy night it is no surprise to find containers rolling about. It is as well just now to check greenhouse windows and other things to make sure there are no weaknesses which will give way during winter storms.
There must be no chance of a frost getting to the frost tender plants because a window has blown out.
The bramley apples are ready now and need to be carefully picked and stored as they last all winter if properly packed away There are plenty of elderberries crab apples and sloes which can be made good use of.
Wild rose hips and hawthorn berries along with acorns - conkers are in evidence now.
The camellias are well into bud and feeding them has now stopped - These will give a splendid display in the early months of next year - a sight worth seeing
A sheltered spot is advisable in this part of the country as early morning frost can damage the beautiful flowers, so most of the plants are wintered in a sheltered hellis area and will shortly be carried in there as they are all kept in containers anyway, so they can live where ever you want

As the month ends it seems dark very soon after tea time - so jobs to be done on winter evenings can be planned now. for indoors

OCTOBER



Turkeys 8 weeks old



April hatched goslings

Oak tree in autumn

Horse Chestnut

Combining Beans

October.

Now I begin to see the onset of winter. There are quite a few chilly nights and pleasant days but also days of cold and rain. The sheep decide they want to come into their shelter when the wind drives the rain onto their backs, making one extra little job each morning to see they have clean straw. There is still plenty of grass for them at present but they are beginning to look nice and rounded in the pregnant area so it will not be long before they need some hard food.

I have been out collecting bits for Christmas decorations. The ivy on the hawthorn is especially good and has come out well in glycerine. For the first time I have also dried eucalyptus twigs and Kolomeasier.

When the frosts finally knock the leaves off the willow I can get cracking on some willow twig rings as bases for hanging or table ornaments

I am always on the look out for bits of bark or driftwood and a walk down the riverbank after high tides often yields a mixed harvest of likely looking pieces. Quite a few of the larger lumps end up in the garden as edgings to hide plant pots or just features on their own

I have already made three batches

of Christmas cakes, so far they have all turned out well and are safely away in tins awaiting the festivities One made eleven months ago was brought out for a birthday and could not have tasted better. As the tin opened the smell of brandy and other good things wafted out and after the cutting up was duly sampled and approved of by all tasters.

My husband created a mock wishing well as a feature for our front garden Apart from a drop of paint and a few pansies for a bit of water colour in the bucket, this item cost nothing and yet looks good. as the timbers were salvaged from the farm next door when a corn drier was dismantled. It was well worth the effort of cleaning up the timbers earlier this year

The turkeys are now half way through their short lives. They are growing at a terrific rate and are fine big birds at eight weeks old The goslings next door are also doing well having had the benefit this year of plenty of good grazing. They are a lovely sight from the front room window and a lovely splash of white even on the dullest of days.

I keep doing a bit of work in the garden. The geraniums are all now safely housed in the greenhouse for the

Winter and I have changed the hanging baskets and other containers to winter plants. I have planted a few extra bulbs of narcissus and chionodoxa. On the sunny days it is very relaxing to get in the garden for an hour or so as there is always a little tidying up job can be done

Our little friend the blue tit has decided it is time to start sleeping in his nest box opposite the kitchen window. There still seems to be plenty of food about for the birds so I have not started filling the nut holders yet I keep seeing the grey heron flying over, I fear he has been visiting the neighbours goldfish pond

The farmers are still busy trying to get the land worked up, the heavy rains of recent weeks making life rather difficult. Some fields of winter wheat and barley are nicely through but slugs are being a menace to the delicate new shoots, munching their way systematically across whole fields making some patching or replanting necessary.

The clocks have gone back now making evening come quickly. Now is the time to get out the knitting or sewing. I cannot have idle hands during the long dark evenings A new jumper or cardigan makes it worthwhile having to sit about a few hours each day.

I have noticed the two cats have grown really thick coats and their appetites have sharpened up considerably recently. They have been leaving their catches outside the back door for me to see

They have also had a number of rabbits, so perhaps that has helped to reduce their population

The pheasants have been coming nearer to the buildings. There is plenty of shelter for them as there are wild areas left especially for the birds and other wildlife

The chestnut trees have shed their leaves and on sunny mornings dozens of ring doves sit facing the sun presumably having a warm-up

October goes out on a very chilly note, - gorgeous sunny days but keen night frosts - winter is definitely on the way - - - -

NOVEMBER

AUTUMN LEAVES

November.

November arrived on a Sunday with an amazing change in the weather, being much milder and quite breezy

Halloween passed over without the sightings of witches or werewolves, just the friendly sound of the resident barn owls hooting to each other. They like the area of permanent meadow and trees where they can hunt undisturbed. A weasel was spotted dashing across the road with a mouse in its mouth.

The kestrel also has his share of the small prey, hovering on the breezing air as if he was hanging on a string.

The strong breeze developed into a gale with the dark low clouds rushing eastwards tearing leaves off the trees depositing them ankle deep on the lawns and paths.

The lack of rain for the past couple of years is certainly being made up for just now - there seems to be some almost every day and some days for the whole day

Another pair of bluetits have taken over the nest box in the front garden At least they have protection during bad nights and they seem to have been grateful for the easy pickings from the peanuts I have put out. The nuts and some bread brought quite a flurry of birds - chaffinch, Greenfinch, sparrows, robin wrens bluetits - great tits blackbirds and the inevitable starlings. The pheasants

seem to have got themselves firmly established in the wild area. They bed down there every night and seem to hide there when the shoot comes round.

Although the weather is bad there is still a bit of colour in the garden - some good winter pansies and plants with nice coloured foliage give a bit of interest on these dull days - even in the greenhouse the geraniums having been potted up for the winter decided to give another flush of flowers. They do very well in the cold greenhouse only needing a touch of heat on sharp frosty nights. Not much watering required at this time just enough to stop roots drying up.

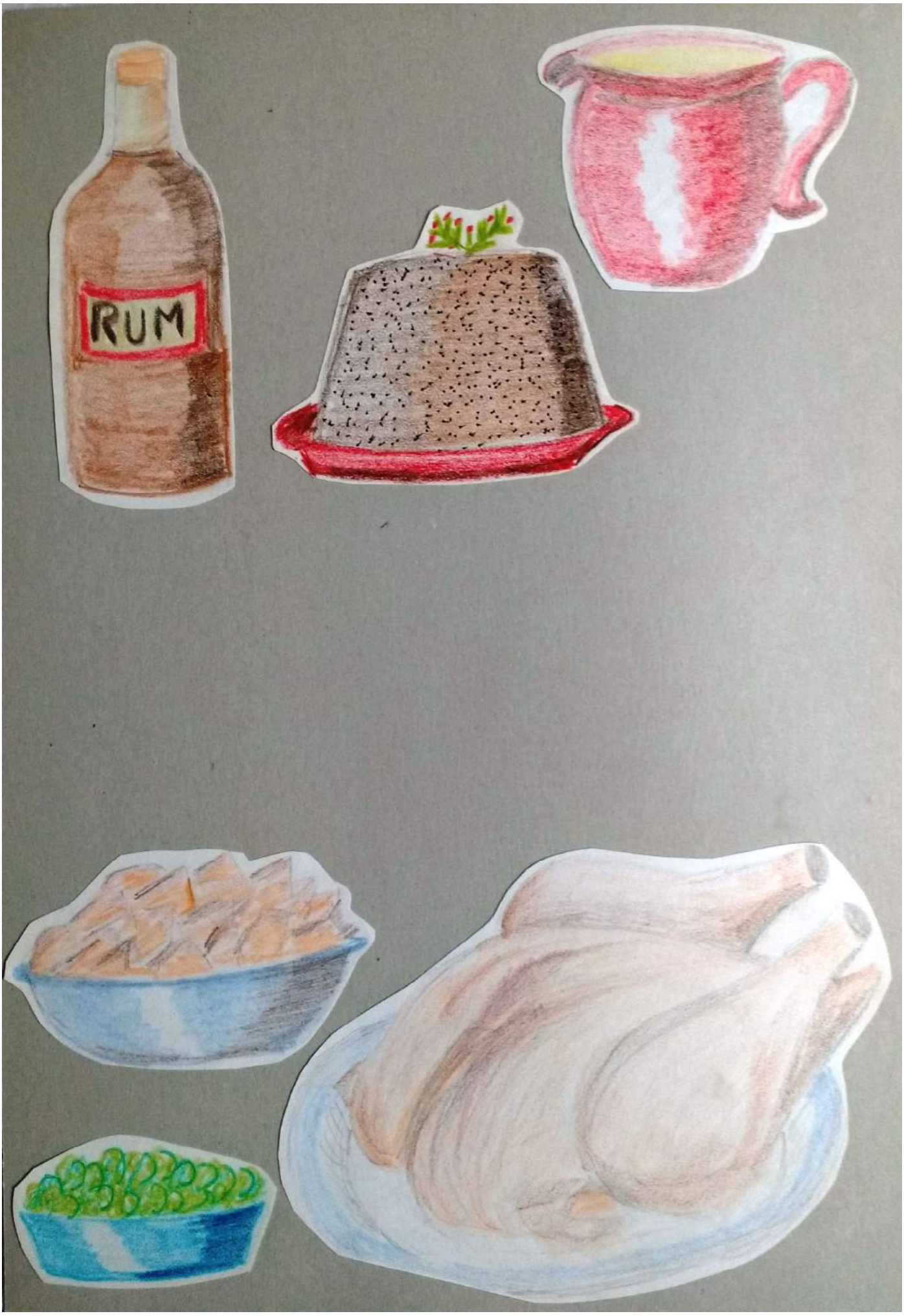
I put a few crocus bulbs in a pot and also brought the amaryllis back to life. Took some cuttings off the Variegated Hebe and potted up some lily of the valley roots - these are lovely in early spring and make a nice gift for a friend to put out in their garden later on.

Back indoors I decided to make another batch of christmas cakes - just to be sure there will be enough - if there is ever enough!! As the weather has been so poor the knitting has been going well. Having found a pattern for a christmas crib I got into doing that and completed it by the end of the month and am highly satisfied with the result.

NV cont

It is also time to start collecting together things for decorations and christmas goodies - the homemade chocs always go down well. This autumn I have invested in one or two books on the subject of flower arrangements and gift ideas so hope to get onto that soon

DECEMBER


RUM

Frost at Christmas

DECEMBER

December arrived with still more rain and rather blustery, not very good for doing any jobs outside. Quite a lot of the land around is standing in water. Our neighbour says he has nearly one hundred acres completely waterlogged and although they have spent a good deal of time digging channels there is nowhere for the excess to go as the dykes are full to the top

The vegetable fields are also in a bad state - the sprout picking machine has been bogged down a few times but they seem to keep going somehow

The sheep are looking well, not yet bothered about the hay they have been offered but spending most of the time out in the most exposed area grazing happily.

It is now time to start getting Christmas cards ready, quite a few needing little notes added and then the ones to be posted can be on their way in good time. As many as possible are delivered by hand and just a few given to last minute visitors.

Two days have been spent making home made sweets - putting them in sweet papers - making boxes - selling them out - wrapping them up, and finally a christmas ribbon round the whole lot. These make good presents

and also are handy to have ready if a present is needed suddenly unexpectedly By the second week of the month it is time to start preparing a few floral decorations. Some of the material collected earlier and dried comes in handy and bits of fresh green off the conifers are also useful additions. Real poinsettias or the very good artificial ones make a very bright eye-catching display Weeping willow twigs collected in November have been made into rings for a door ornament.

A few turkeys had to been done early for Christmas events taking place. They dressed out very well, making it feel worth while all the work that goes into rearing them. All the orders for christmas are in now

About a week before Christmas the weather changed dramatically. The temperature dropped below freezing day and night and was accompanied by thick fog. During the few days before the holiday the turkeys had to be dressed, some baking of mince pies and other cakes to be done, cards to be hand delivered, and final bits of shopping bought in. People calling round to collect there birds which all dressed out beautifully ranging from neat little hens to goliath stags.

December cont.

Although a white Christmas was not forecast it certainly was one. The frost built up so much on the fields and trees over the past week it could have easily been mistaken for snow. Everything looked so beautiful it was worth taking a few photographs to capture the memory

Christmas day passed quietly - some visitors came later in the day - so presents were exchanged. Other presents had been opened earlier in the day and a lovely dinner partaken of about one o'clock. The dogs enjoyed their dinners today as they all had some bits of turkey on top of their usual meal Christmas night was spent relaxing and sampling the chocolates along with a drink. The best way these days is to have drinks at home - no driving involved then - besides it was thick fog all day.

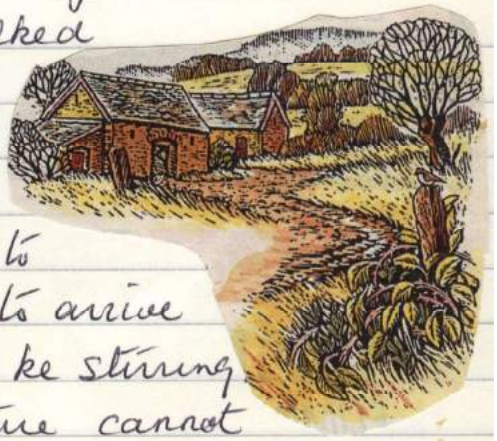
Boxing day arrived still gripped in frost but during the day the temperature rose enough to melt it all bringing back the normal dark colour of the winter trees. The grass always looks squashed and lifeless after hard frost - no worms for the blackbirds just now but they always resort to the crab-apples at this time of year when other food is scarce. The small cherry-like fruits always stay on the tree after the leaves have gone making a brilliant display during winter.

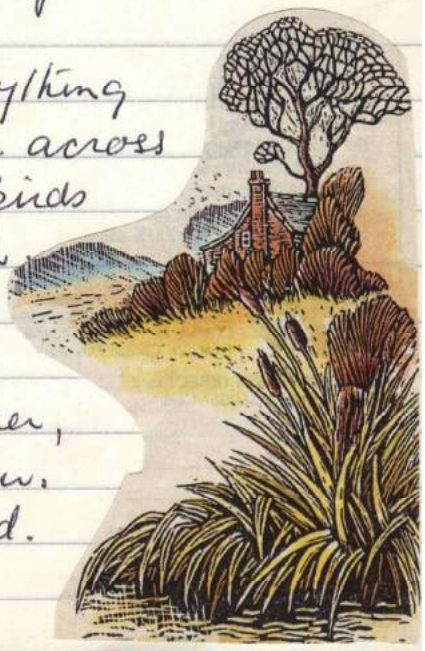
Some of the conifers in the garden always

produce small ones which seem to provide a food source for the small birds
The Christmas roses were actually flowering well for Christmas but the frost made them hard to see. Now it has gone they look good and the snowdrop leaves are well up
The sheep have been glad of a feed each morning as well as their daily hay ration. This will be regular now as lambs are due mid January.
It seems time waits for no man as even on the Sunday of Christmas weekend the men were at work still harvesting sprouts
The turkeys house needs to be cleaned out and pressure washed down - it seems rather desolate now the beautiful white birds are gone, but once cleaned out it can be used if necessary as a maternity ward for the ewes
The poor old ram has not been looking well for a while, if he continues to deteriorate in spite of the treatment he had I fear the worst for him
December is going out on a very chilly note. Every night is well below freezing and quite a bit of fog still persists New years Eve was no exception as under a clear starlit sky the frost really gripped again. The nut holders for the birds were refuelled yet again at least they will see the new year in with a good breakfast.

Boxing Day

Dad was already up when the alarm woke me at six o'clock. We collected our things together - sandwiches - flasks - guns, etc and out into the frosty air we went. The drive to the lake through the darkness and mist was pleasant enough. We left the car and walked quietly the last quarter mile to the lake.



We settled down to wait for the dawn to arrive when the duck would be stirring. This closeness to nature cannot be equalled. The still water - the sun coming slowly up over the trees.

Suddenly everything was alive - a noise across the water sent all the birds skywards in one rush. Well - we had only hoped for a duck for New Years dinner, but not this year. I was secretly glad.