

Agricultural & Rural Chaplaincy Report
April 2010.



During the Summer months I continue going to the Livestock Markets at Bishop's Castle, Oswestry and Shrewsbury, and making any visits which are necessary. I also attend special sales, either of livestock, or Farm Sales.

I also attend as many Agricultural Shows as possible. For me, the Show season starts with the Staffordshire Country Show, which is always the Wednesday and Thursday after the Spring Bank Holiday Monday. I usually only go for one day.

Then there's a break until the Shropshire and West Midlands Show towards the end of June. That's been renamed the Shropshire Show, and will be under new management so it will be interesting to see how things work out there this year. It's a two day Show, and I'm there all day for both days.

Then it's the Newport Show, followed by the Royal Welsh Show in July. Newport is a one day Show, the Royal Welsh is a four day Show, and I'm there for all four days.

August is the busiest month: Burwarton, Oswestry, Tenbury Wells, Shrewsbury Flower Show, Minsterley, and the Steam Rally at Onslow Park. Tenbury Wells and Oswestry Shows are held on the same day, so I go to one Show one year and the other Show the following year. The Flower Show and the Steam Rally are two day Shows, and I'm there both days.

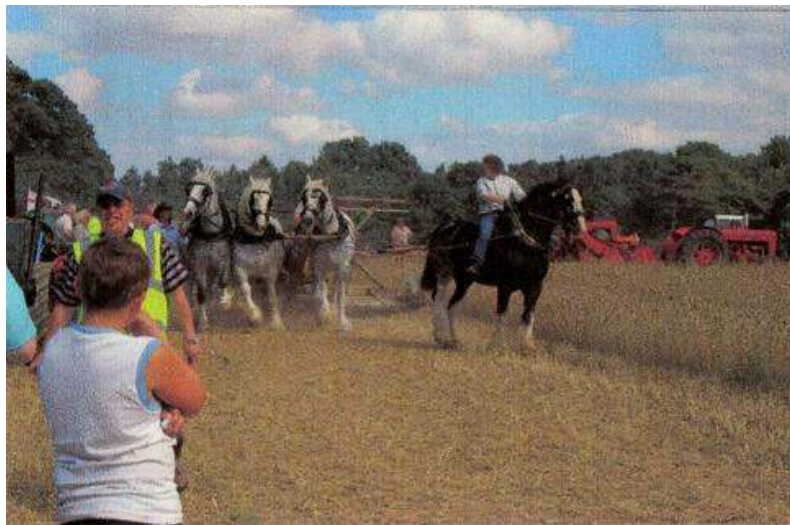
In September there's Ludlow Food and Drink Festival, which is a 3 day Show held in the grounds of Ludlow Castle, and I try to visit it on one day. Towards the end of the month Cruckton Ploughing Match is held, which is another day out.

The Shows follow a similar format. All of them have trade stands, so I spend time walking around them. Many of the stall holders go round the different Shows, so I meet them quite a few times over the summer, and they come from all over the country. You can imagine my surprise when I went to my first Burwarton Show and saw a stall which looked familiar - I'd seen it, and the owners, many times in the north east of England, but didn't expect to see them down here! Over the years, I've got to know many of the stall holders very well, and it's good to talk to them each year - and often at each show!

All of the Shows have a main ring, where various events are held. There is always Show jumping, and over the years I've seen some of the top names in action, as some of the Shows have qualifiers for the Horse of the Year Show. Some have inter Hunt relays, and Pony Club mounted games, which are always exciting to watch. They also have the "main attraction" and I've watched various motorcycle display teams, the Royal Horse Artillery, the Household Cavalry, and the Kangaroos Gymnastic Display Team - to name but a few. Some of the smaller Shows have more local main ring entertainment, but I've still seen some pretty amazing stunts and events.

I spend quite a lot of my time in the livestock area, talking to farmers and their families, and watching the judging. Over the years various people have explained to me what the judges are looking for, and I'm fascinated by the comments of onlookers - both during and after the judging, because not everyone agrees with the judges' choice! I've even started trying to guess what the results will be myself.

The flower arrangements on display at all the Shows are quite incredible - especially to me, as I'm not a flower arranger! The marquees at the Shrewsbury Flower Show are a fantastic sight. The displays of different flowers, their colours, and the way they've been displayed are just breathtaking. I must admit, I expect the professional growers and nurseries to produce a fantastic display, but some of the flowers grown in people's green houses and gardens are just as spectacular. The Flower Show ends with an equally spectacular fireworks display, and crowds gather to watch it (at strategic viewing places outside the Quarry, as well as inside it!).



At some stage of each Show, I find my way to the heavy horses, and the Steam Rally and Cruckton Ploughing Match provide me with the opportunity to see them in action. I'm fascinated by the steam engines and the horses, and discovered that the word 'acre' comes from the distance a man and horse can plough in one day. Cruckton Ploughing Match is a competition for all to show their ploughing skills - from the heavy horses, through the earliest tractors, right up to the most modern tractors and machinery available today. Seeing them all in one field, or a couple of fields, really brings home to me how far we have come. As I've wandered round the fields watching the ploughing, I've also been taught how the furrows are measured, and what the judges are looking for in a good ploughman. The presentation of prizes is always preceded by the band playing "A Farmer's Boy".

Shows are very long days, I'm usually there by 8 am and it can be gone 10 pm when I leave - But I find it's a very important part of my ministry in rural areas.

I've visited farms the day before the show and have watched as farmers have chosen their livestock and started to get them ready. Then I've watched at the show as the final grooming is done to make sure they are presented in the best possible way. I've also watched farmers cleaning and currycombing stock before it's sold at market. Everything has to be the best it can be - because animal (and cakes, jams, flowers etc) and farmer (or maker & producer) are "on show". That's food for thought for all of us isn't it?

Eleanor Reddington.