

WASC 766

ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE

WASC 766
WAI 155



W.A.S.C. 766

Muscovies to the table

From Mr Harold Kirwan-Taylor

SIR, The Rev N G O'Connor [A London Diary, 27 August] can rest assured that grey Muscovy ducks are not uncommon. I have many ducks and ducklings in a variety of colours including grey. They are attractive 'nursery' birds that make squeaky noises and wag their tails when talked to, fly like pigeons, settle on roofs and sometimes nest in trees.

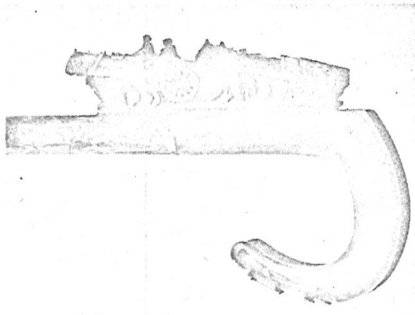
As a table bird they are delicious and there is more flesh on them than on the Aylesbury. I imagine they are not more popular simply because the flesh is slightly darker. The ignorant English housewife does not know what a treat she is missing. We lose a number to foxes, but that is the price we have to pay for the stupidity of man in eliminating the rabbit.

HAROLD KIRWAN-TAYLOR
Mersham, Kent.

A stick in time

From Mr Edward W Hart

SIR, Your advice [13 August] on the best time to cut a walking stick may be botanically correct, but is it practical? Few things are more exasperating than to mark the stick of one's dreams growing straight and thin in wood or hedgerow, to watch it mature into autumnal perfection, and then to have it taken by another, perhaps at dead of night.

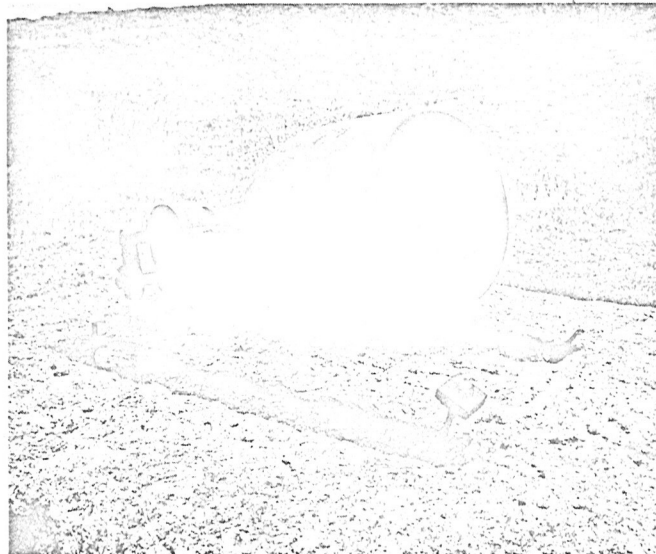


To avoid such feelings of wrathful indignation, surely it is better to follow the example of a Yorkshire dalesman and expert stick dresser. When asked the same question, his straight answer was: "When thoo sees t'boogger."

My photograph (above) shows what must approach the ultimate in stick dressing, carved by a Northumbrian, Mr Norman Tulip, of Alnwick. The crook, horses and carts were carved from a single horn.

EDWARD W HART
Ripon, Yorkshire.

Signs of a gunpowder factory on Dartmoor which ceased production before 1900. The gunpowder, or black rock powder, was made of saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur. After being ground, mixed and dried, the gunpowder was graded by one of two methods. Either a charge of gunpowder was put into boreholes in a granite slab and ignited, the explosion splitting the slab and the split being measured. Pieces of the granite slabs are shown on the left. Or, a more accurate method of testing the powder was by a proving mortar or eprouvette, shown on the right. From the eprouvette an iron ball weighing about 68lb was fired, and the powder was graded according to the distance the ball travelled. The pictures are by Mr R Vine, of Ashurst Wood, East Grinstead, in Sussex.



Land of our farmers

From Mr J T Payne

SIR, With the many aspects of the countryside being examined in this Conservation Year, probably the most important is being overlooked: Who in future will carry the ultimate responsibility for maintaining amenity values and implementing recommendations?

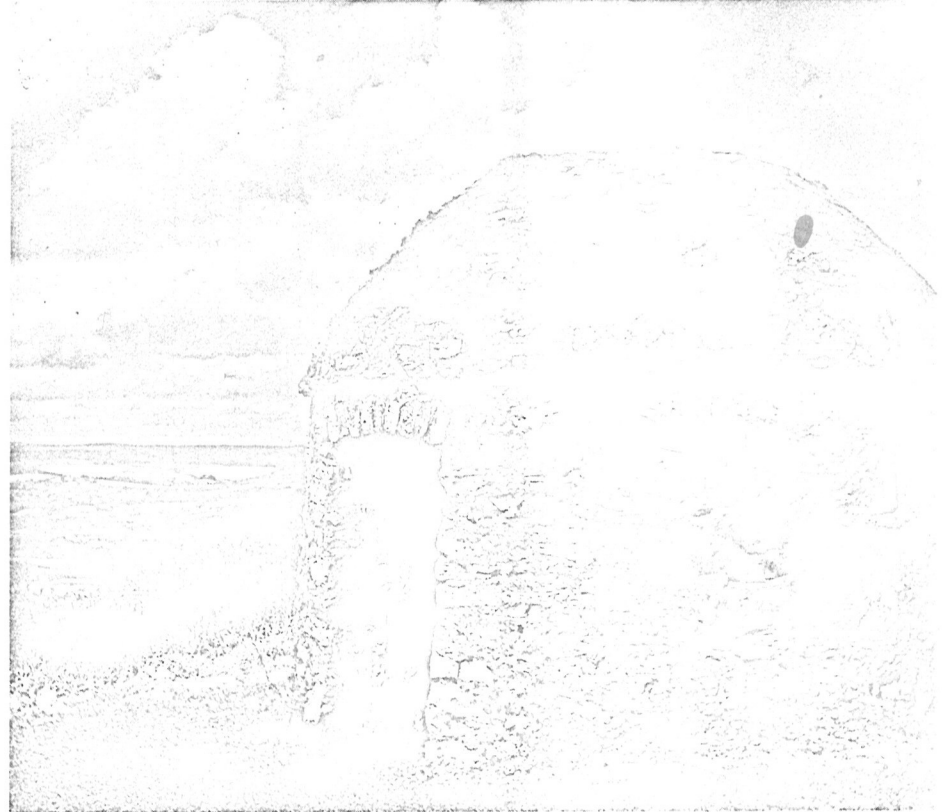
Agriculture represents the largest holding organization, and the future composition of the farming industry will have the greatest effect in maintaining our heritage and releasing its wealth for the mutual benefit of all.

Generally, many of the proposals are only reaffirming accepted principles in good estate management that were practised by private owners at the turn of this century. The breaking up of estates and tenancies into owner-occupied units has resulted in decimation and near-disaster, a situation difficult to redress.

It is appreciated that small farming units are not economic, and the national policy is for amalgamation into what are described as commercial units. The ultimate size of these units is not known, but if we accept 5,000 acres as a target we return full circle within the century.

What kind of organization will be offered to anyone able and willing to accept the responsibility for the administration of a near-two-million-pound investment? Practically the only new workers coming into the industry are family members of present owner-occupiers, attracted with the prospect of being independent *bona fide* farmers one day, but ownership of land in economic quantity by individuals will be impossible by hereditary succession since duties and taxes will ensure a diminishing process.

Yet these young people, inheriting knowledge of nature and husbandry, are the life blood of farming and the countryside and, if the opportunity to retain them is not taken, they will disperse and their



Early warning system: Culmstock Beacon, on the hills above Culmstock, Devon, at the western end of the range of the Blackdown Hills. Built of coarse masonry, it is circular, with an internal diameter of about 12ft and an overall height of over 10ft; the roof apex has an opening through it. The doorway faces south-east, and the building was probably used as a place in which to light a beacon fire, from brushwood and faggots; the flames and smoke would escape through the roof opening and be visible for miles. The picture is from Mr Geoffrey N Wright, of Limpley Stoke, in Somerset.

quality cannot be replaced. They should be offered a chance to remain upon a genuine partnership basis, encouraged to invest and take responsibility for their own capital within the framework of a co-partnership organization.

Each branch of the enterprise would require deep knowledge and specialization

to a high degree and, because the resultant staff would be intelligent and competent, it would be qualified to take an active part in general management and entitled to participation in the benefits of land ownership.

J T PAYNE
Laughterton, Lincolnshire.

EXTRACTS FROM OTHER LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Keeping in touch

With reference to Nimrod's piece [27 August] about the No 11 bus route being known as the banana line, I have it on good authority that they have been going in convoy since the middle of the last war and have not lost a bus yet. R C BECKETT, Damerham, Hampshire.

Seagulls on burnt ground

Mr Paul's letter was of interest. Last autumn I saw about 1,000 herring-gulls

on recently burnt ground at the rubbish tip near Lymington. The gull has few breeding records here and I have never seen such a gathering. They may have come from the Isle of Wight. I have heard that burning brings insects to the surface. MAUD M BRUCE, Brockenhurst, Hampshire.

Snipe drumming

Captain Gilbey's letter [27 August] about snipe drumming gives a quotation from

Eric Parker's *Shooting Days*. Years ago Parker showed me how, by sticking the drumming feathers into a cork on the end of a string and whirling it round, the drumming could be reproduced. DOUGLAS SERVICE, London, NW3.

Shoes for brakes

Mr Phillips [20 August] asks about the term 'brake shoe'. Early attempts at slowing wheels seem to have been mostly by wood, which through friction always burnt out—even the block. Before the rubber sole was thought of, the metal age arrived and a flat sandal-like gadget, with low sides and back, was jammed under these wheels. This is the origin of brake shoes. As the wooden block burnt out more quickly with iron wheels, a tough leather, as used for shoe soles, was tried. B W BROWNING (Captain), Dorking, Surrey.

Double retrieves

I do not think Mr Runton's double retrieve [27 August] is so unusual. The grandfather of my present Labrador did this on several occasions with grouse; he did surprise me when he brought in two cock pheasants. His son is continually bringing me hedgehogs. (Colonel) F LONGDEN SMITH, Skipton, Yorkshire.

A black tern hooked

With reference to Mr Woodhouse's letter [27 August], over 70 years ago I was fishing from a boat on the Gleniffer Burn, near Glasgow. I had cast my line, when I was taken by a black tern, on an Alexander fly, too far down to save its life. It ended up in a Glasgow bird museum. This tern was a rare find on the west side of Scotland. SIR STEPHEN RENSCHAW, BT, East Dereham, Norfolk.