



Brailsford and District Ploughing and Hedgecutting Society

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'The Long Furrow – a History of Brailsford and District
Ploughing and Hedgecutting Society' by Launce Waud.

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A Guide for Teachers



Facts about Brailsford Ploughing and Hedgecutting Society

1. It started back in 1895 so is nearly 125 years old.
2. A match has been held every year except during WWI and WWII – can children think why this was so?
3. The first match took place at Church Fields Farm in Brailsford.
4. Some of the descendants of the first committee are still farming today – Burtons in Kirk Langley, Goodalls in Ednaston, Yates of Brailsford and Archers of Bradley.
5. It was started when 2 farmers bet each other who could plough the best! It soon grew into a competition for all farmers to encourage the highest standards of workmanship in two of the oldest crafts in farming.
6. Tractor ploughing classes were first introduced in 1922 – nearly 100 years ago but were dropped after 3 years because there were insufficient entrants. Why would this be? They began again in late 1944 – can you think why?
7. It is the largest ploughing match in Derbyshire.
8. The first time children attended was in 1927 – they came from Brailsford School. They came without charge and to this day, children are not charged for entry.
9. The Society covers an area that lies 12 miles in radius from Brailsford Post Office. This covers 2/5ths of Derbyshire and an area of 452 sq. miles.
10. It was only in 1987 that a Ladies Section was formed and the Ladies Tent with its competitions introduced. Men are allowed to enter all the competitions in the tent.
11. Entries for the children's competitions are free but a donation to the Society can be made if wished. Small cash prizes are awarded to the competition winners, to be collected on the day, after 3.30pm.

What else can be seen?

1. There is another craft tent where some people can be seen making items e.g. spinners and where others are selling items they have made.
2. There are lots of agricultural trade stands where companies come along and try to sell their machinery to farmers – can children spot any of this happening?
3. There is a section of old engines often used on farms in the olden days – again owners are willing to explain what they were used for.
4. There are hay and straw bales – do the children know which is which and what they are used for? Hay is dried grass and used to feed the animals. Straw is used mainly for bedding animals but can be used to feed animals although it has little nutritional value and has to be supplemented.
5. There is a Children's Tent which is basically an empty tent where children can sit and have their lunch – it is available throughout the day. If the day is fine and dry they can sit anywhere in the site providing they are safe.
6. There are plenty of toilets around the site though these are shared with the general public.
7. There is a beer tent –farmers enjoy the day out, meeting friends and having a good chat and having a drink! Farmers often work by themselves and it can be quite a lonely life.



What children can get out of a visit to the Match

- History – a rare opportunity to see 100 years of history before their eyes (how the land is ploughed) and to see the development of machinery used for ploughing
- Geography – to see the first stages of producing wheat for bread and biscuit-making or barley for making beer
- Geography – to understand why ploughing takes place
- Environmental – to understand why farmers lay hedges and why this helps bird life and keeps animals secure in a field
- Environmental – to help children understand the nature of farming in the 21st century and help them understand that food is grown and does not just appear in supermarkets
- Science – to see the wide range of vegetables that can be grown in this country – think about what they do or don't eat
- Maths – the possibility of comparing how long it takes to plough 1 acre of land now compared to 100 years ago
- English – to write about a visit
- English - to write an instructional piece of work based on what they have seen
- Art/Craft – to look at the many rural-based crafts that are still alive in the countryside and to bring awareness to traditional ways of working
- R.E. – to show them God's abundance in what the land can produce
- Enjoyment – a day in the fresh air!

Further information - about the match with pictures can be found by searching for brailsfordploughingmatch.org.uk

On the website you will find a Risk Assessment for visiting schools.

Ploughing

Background Facts

1. Ploughing has taken place since Neolithic times – early man understood that the soil must be disturbed to create a tilth (loose soil on top) to enable seeds to grow.
2. Early ploughs were made of wood (oak) and pulled by oxen.
3. Horses were used instead of oxen from the 18th century.
4. Major change took place during the 20th century. Tractors came into use between the wars but it was WWII that really precipitated change when more food had to be grown at home so all farmers bought tractors to speed up production. The first tractor came from the USA in 1917.
5. The 'share' digs into the ground and the mouldboard is the part of the plough that turns the soil over- both made from steel.
6. Men walked behind the horses to guide the plough – a difficult and hard task. This happened during daylight only.
7. A pair of oxen could plough 1 acre of land in 1 day (10 hours of work).The farmer walked 9 – 10 miles to do this.
8. Horses could plough 1.5 to 2 acres a day.
9. Nowadays fields can be ploughed 24 hours a day because tractors have lights.
10. In 10 hours a modern tractor can plough about 20 acres a day – it depends on the size of the tractor and the size of the plough. Nowadays ploughs come in different sizes –the more 'mould boards' you have the quicker you can plough a field. In the old days fields could only be ploughed in one direction. Nowadays ploughs can be turned over so they can plough in both directions. They are called reversible ploughs.

The Ladies' Tent

Inside the Ladies' Tent are a wide range of competitions. It is only called this because ladies organise the activities in this tent while the men look after the ploughing, hedgecutting and generally run the show.

So what can children see in here?

1. The competitions that they and other schools have entered together with certificates for the winners. Prize money can be collected from 3.30pm onwards.
2. A wide range of vegetables all grown locally. Ask the children to identify them.
3. Eggs – why are some broken? The judge can look at them – if the white is thick and close to the yolk then the egg is very fresh. If the white spreads out a long way then the egg is stale.
4. Lots of baking competitions – cakes, bread, cheesecakes, scones, sausage rolls, fruit loaf, etc. Discuss the topping on some of the cheesecakes – would children have judged them in the same way?
5. Jars of jam and chutney.
6. Flowers – can children identify the types of flowers?
7. Craft – competitions vary each year but there is always a range of hobbies on show. This can be an introduction into a wide range of hobbies they may like to pick up on in later life.
8. Photographs and paintings – as No.6.



Walking Sticks and Wood Carving

Carving wood has been a long-held tradition among rural folk. It requires skill and patience to produce such detailed work. Here it falls into two categories – stick competitions and wood carving.

Stick Competitions

There are 16 different competitions people can enter and this show is a qualifying event for the ‘World Stickmaking Championships’ so the standard is very high.

Sticks can be plain or fancy and the heads can be made from wood or horn – where do children think the horn comes from?

On the heads are carved fishes, birds or animals. There are also classes for novices (Beginners) as well as miniature sticks.

The stickmakers are happy to show the children what they have carved and to talk about their work. Ask the children to look at the sticks for sale and see what price they are – why do they think they are so expensive? Some are crooks – why are they this shape?

Wood Carving

Alongside the stickmakers are the wood carvers and they, too, are happy to discuss what they are doing.

Please don't handle the sticks unless you are asked to as they have taken many hours to produce and some are very valuable.

Be careful if they are using tools from flying chips of wood.

What to look for on the ploughing site – ALWAYS start with the horses

1. Look at how many pairs of horses are ploughing and count how many shares they have on their plough.
2. Look at how the horses are turned out – how many horse brasses are they wearing?
3. The competition is judged on the furrows (turned over soil). They should be: very straight, hide all the weeds, the soil should be firm and the start and end should be even for both horse and tractor ploughing.
4. Move on to the first tractors – are farmers protected from the weather? Look at how much faster they can plough.
5. Move along to the latest and largest tractors all with cabs to protect farmers. These have heaters in and use GPS to help them.
6. Compare what the new ploughs are made of compared to the horse-drawn ones.
7. Ask the children which way they would like to plough a field – behind a horse or in a warm, dry tractor cab.
8. Think about which is quicker to get started on the ploughing with – a pair of horses or a tractor. Horses had to be groomed after a day in the field to get the mud off them – and the farmer would be tired by then!
9. The harness (leather straps) have to be oiled to stop it from cracking, the horse brasses have to be polished and the horses' manes have to be plaited – think about how long it takes the farmer to get the horses ready for ploughing today.
10. Ask the horse ploughmen where they have come from – some travel a long way to take part in the competition.

Beware! Horse can be unpredictable so don't get too near their back legs. Tractors are very large, moving pieces of technology. Stay well away when they are turning.

Hedgecutting

At first glance it can appear that farmers are damaging the hedges as they cut them down but there is a genuine purpose to this task!

What happens

1. If a hedge is left to grow without being trimmed each year the top part of the hedge gets taller but the bottom part becomes thinner as all the plant's energy is put into making it as tall as it can so animals can push their way out at the bottom and escape!
2. So hedge-laying takes place to increase the amount of foliage low down to make the hedge 'stock-proof'.
3. This is done by cutting away the high branches altogether and then splitting the branch near the ground so that it can be bent and laid diagonally. Judges are looking for clean cuts with the axe. Can children identify this?
4. These diagonal branches are woven around stakes, put in very straight, already driven into the ground. This gives a solid line of vegetation through which an animal cannot escape.
5. As the hedge grows it puts out smaller branches lower down and as leaves grow on those branches the whole hedge becomes much denser. Birds like nesting in these.
6. Once a hedge is laid, and providing it is cut each year it will last for many, many years without being re-done.
7. Hedge-cutting is a skilled task that some people go to classes to learn how to do it properly.
8. There are different styles of hedge-laying across the country.
9. Anyone who reaches a Proficiency standard in Hedgecutting can go on to enter the National competition. Winners at Brailsford have become national champions in the past.

Beware! Hedge-cutters use very dangerous equipment such as chain saws and axes.

Animals

Each year there are a number of animals on show. While it is not possible to state what type of animals are there on the day it is worth the children taking a look at these.

Cattle are split into 2 types

- Dairy cattle which provide milk which can be sold on as fresh milk, butter, cheese, ice-cream, cream and yoghurt.
- Beef Cattle which provide roast beef, beefburgers and all types of cuts for casseroles, stews and lasagnes.

There are no dairy cattle at the Match!

Breeds of Beef Cattle – Hereford, Charolais, Aberdeen Angus, Simmental – ask the farmer which breed they are if you don't know

These cattle are judged by experts – look out for the rosettes.

Sheep are mainly reared for their meat but some are milked. Some people react to cows' milk and their products but can cope with ewe's milk. There are very few sheep-milking farmers in Derbyshire so the sheep on display here are for meat and wool.

Some years the Bloodhounds attend. These are a pack of hounds that chase a scent laid by a person and they do not kill any wild animals. They are controlled by men on horseback but the horses are not on show. You can stroke the dogs carefully!

Please use the hand sanitisers placed near the animals if children have touched any animals.