

'The Farm' *continued...*

We arrived in Lancashire in 1992 to take up a tenancy with the National Trust at Bank House Farm in Silverdale which was already an established organic farm. A post was available for Bill as a part time warden for the Trust, managing its various nature reserves in the area and liaising with groups of volunteers. Income from the farm, combined with Bill's wardening salary and Cath's earnings as a nurse provided viable means for raising our three children. A specific requirement of the tenancy agreement was that we use our livestock to graze the Trust's nature reserves around the Arnside and Silverdale AONB, none of which had received any grazing for decades, which meant that much of the species-rich limestone grassland that these sites were noted for had been gradually overtaken by scrub and secondary woodland.

Bill soon established the new grazing regimes on the Trust's reserves along with an ongoing programme of scrub management, in which he was aided by teams of volunteers, all of which helped to check the advancing scrub. At the same time, other conservation bodies had offered additional land parcels for their cattle to graze, most of which, having long been abandoned for agriculture, was now undergoing a similar transformation to scrub and woodland. This burgeoning demand for conservation grazing eventually led to Bill resigning the warden's post to concentrate full-time on the livestock farming, which by now had developed into a thriving business, centred around marketing all of the farm's finished lamb, beef and pork as farm-gate sales, an outlet that Cath had successfully developed.

After nearly ten years at Bank House, during which the demand for conservation grazing locally continued to increase, we eventually decided to give up the farm tenancy to better concentrate on the grazing and for Cath to take on a new nursing role. Leaving the farm released sufficient capital with which to begin investing in buying a house, whilst Bill used time saved from running the farm to generate outside income from providing advice on conservation grazing and organic livestock production. Over these last 20 years we have acquired some land of our own which includes a large barn so we now have a sound base from which to conduct conservation grazing, with facilities for supervising calving and storing feed and farm equipment

The MBCGCo has continued to work in mutual co-operation with its non-NT landlords (the Trust's own reserves having passed to their new tenant at Bank House). This still left us with many other bits of land that we leased for little or no rent in return for delivering the grazing regimes that were required to meet the prescription set out in each landlord's Stewardship Agreement. This arrangement has allowed landowners to continue claiming their annual stewardship payment, whilst the company received the Basic Payment for whatever eligible area is registered with the RPA. This same format has continued with very little adjustment until today, demonstrating the kind of reliability that comes out of mutual interdependence between both 'dual use' parties. The transition to DEFRA's new ELM schemes seems like it might disrupt this equilibrium but hopefully the levels of trust and understanding that have developed over time will be enough to ensure that a similarly equitable deal continues for the future.