

The Listener

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At the age of 15 I saw my uncle walk off the farm in a temper and leave my mother and me to cope with it. No doubt he felt that we would soon follow, for the farm was farmed out. Thin sandy soil on slopes facing the sun had been drenched in fertilisers, and cash crops like potatoes did the rest. We were heavily in debt and so unable to spend on stock and feeding stuffs. My own health was poor and Mother was still suffering from the loss of my father. The only ingredient left was work. And we worked to the full by growing large quantities of mushrooms, putting them everywhere—farm buildings, the house and cellar.

This crop quickly brought funds and some knowledge of the teeming life that exists in decay: the rotting mass brought to life not only mushrooms but my soil as well. Spread on growing potatoes in the early stages as it came out of the mushroom shed, it seemed to galvanise my soil into activity, feeding and increasing the soil worm population and I suspect many other soil animals. This experience fed a hungry and despairing mind with sound natural practices and theories. That it was the organic matter near the surface that mattered most was proved time and time again. Farmyard manure ploughed down was as useless to that year's crop as the fertilisers were to the next year's.

We used a crop of hardy greens, rape and rye, with the mushrooms and farmyard manure spread on top after the crop was up. Leaving it through the winter for young stock and sheep-grazing in February changed all our farm thinking. Many forces

Arthur Hollins of Fordhall's Farm



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