



## COUNTRYMAN AND WOMAN OF THE YEAR 2005

It's that time of year again. **Bill Taylor** pays tribute to the men and women who are striving to make rural Britain a better place

**THIS YEAR'S** awards for both Countryman and Countrywoman of the Year go to two Shropshire farmers in their early twenties who are fighting to stay on the land. Such an event is unusual enough in itself. But their struggle goes to the heart of this magazine's constant debate on the future of our countryside. Ben and Charlotte Hollins are trying to raise £800,000 to save Fordhall Farm near Market Drayton from developers. The farm risks being turned into a factory. Their late father, Arthur Hollins, was one of the pioneers of the modern organic farming movement in Britain.

Our two twenty-something tenant farmers have set up a community land trust and are selling shares in the farm at £50 each. Investors will never make a dividend in cash, for the trust will be a non-profit organisation. "You'll be investing in everything the farm represents," says Charlotte Hollins, "and standing up for something you believe in. We are saying there should be a future for family farms growing organic local produce, farming in a way that encourages wildlife and supplying local food that keeps us and the environment healthy."

Rural economists believe the scheme also provides a model for the future. Greg Pilley, a national expert on community supported agri-

The Hollins with a Gloucester Old-Spot Tamworth cross



# New battle for Britain



culture, says: "Many young farmers have the skills and motivation, but little capital. At the same time, the demand for good locally grown food increases and people want to re-connect with local farms and build sustainable rural communities."

Let's hope that Ben and Charlotte are still around next Christmas to pass their award on to the winner for 2006.

### Ferryman poet

I also want to celebrate the life and work of a country poet who has notched up the surprise publishing success of this year. For most of his working life, Kevin Pyne was a familiar face as boatman and ferryman on the River Dart in Devon. He loves the ports and harbours of the West

Country, the ships and boats and all the 'boy-like' things of river life. "As children, we were cast loose like moorland cattle every summer and not rounded up again till September for school. I always seemed to have wet feet and the smell of fish. I've never lost that childlike perception."

Kevin was a happy man, living out his whole life in the country town of his birth. Then his wife Lyzie died of cancer and the poetry just poured out of him. His first book of verse *Further Up the River*, as much about his love of the West Country as his devotion to the wife he lost, touched a nerve in country people and had to be re-printed three times in very quick succession.

Kevin has planted a small wood overlooking the sea as a living mem-

Boatman poet Kevin Pyne and pet dog