



Working with fellow campaigner Sophie, we began to hold events at the farm; anything that would involve the local community and use the land to benefit them.

Word was passed around and one volunteer (who helped to plant the trees) managed to persuade the Daily Telegraph

to write an article about our story (see overleaf). The publicity snowballed, with stories following from the Guardian, Daily Express, Daily Mail, and even the Japanese Times and an Italian fashion magazine!

With just weeks to go and working hard inside our office within the 18th century farmhouse (which you can see at the top of the field as you approach the farm), Sophie, the volunteers and I still had £250,000 to raise! However, thanks to the continued involvement of lots of different people, shares were purchased from individuals around the world, and the campaign succeeded only 24 hours before our deadline.

Fordhall Organic Farm is now in community ownership for perpetuity.

Follow the trail through the gate into the woodland.



This Norman Ring-work and Bailey site hosts our Forest School, with its new volunteer built roundhouse. This is where children and young people come to learn outdoor skills, have fun and climb trees away from modern 'cotton wool' society. It is a great place to make dens and have adventures - what better way to learn?

Continue your walk following the arrows. You may like to take time to picnic in this area. Go over the Ringwork and Bailey site, down the steps, through the wicket gate and turn to your left. Go through the large gate at the bottom of the hill and follow the fence on the right, past the large spring-fed pool.

You soon pass our largest spring-fed pool, from which the livestock drink. We also organise pond dipping here with children during the holidays, with our new volunteer built pond dipping platform – watch our website for up and coming activities. We try to organise as many events as possible, ensuring we use the farm for 'community benefit', whilst increasing awareness of food and farming, such as summer fairs, farmers' markets, art days, dawn chorus walks, children's activities, local beer festivals and much more.

We are proud to be England's first community-owned farm. We aim to demonstrate that small-scale farming, when connected to the local community, can offer a viable way of life for generations to come. We want to involve you in as many ways as possible - Fordhall is your farm. If you can think of an activity we are not yet doing, let us know. We are waiting for your ideas!

As you pass the pool on your right, you will approach a small wicket gate. Go through this and through the hedge to your left. Then head through the centre of the field back to the farmyard, cafe and farm shop.

Thank you for visiting Fordhall. Why not take Ben's or Arthur's Walk on your next visit, and learn more about Fordhall?



Charlotte's Walk



Follow the story of how Charlotte helped save Fordhall Farm from industrial development, and raised over £800,000 in less than 6 months with the help of the community!

A 20-30 minute Walk





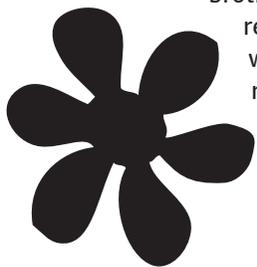
Background: This is a whistle-stop tour of how Fordhall came to be community owned. The story begins in the late 1980s, when the Müller Dairy moved next door to our family farm at Fordhall. As you begin to walk towards our community garden, you can see the grey warehouse buildings of Müller ahead to your left, at the far northeast side of the farm.

Despite the fact my family have lived here as tenant farmers for generations, the Müller development and possible expansion onto Fordhall was too tempting for our landlord. My father, Arthur Hollins, spent his whole life building up the fertility of the pastures organically (more about this in Arthur's Walk). So, we didn't want to leave, and fought every eviction notice.

Fifteen years later, and my parents, Arthur and Connie, were still fighting. Ill health and a lack of money led to the deterioration of Fordhall, providing the landlord with the power to evict us from our home.

In March 2004, we were due to be evicted from the home our family had lived in for over 200 years. My brother Ben and I, at 19 and 21 years respectively, were determined that we did not want to leave and so we revived the fight to save Fordhall from development.

A planning inquiry bought us some time and we secured an



18-month tenancy – only 24 hours before we were due to be evicted! Our first task - to rebuild the farm business.

Begin your walk through to the community garden. The vegetable beds here are worked by our care farm - adults with learning disabilities and wonderful volunteers.

Whilst Ben moved his focus to the daily grind of farming (see Ben's walk), I concentrated on the fight to save the farm. With absolutely no idea of how best to do it, I simply began by involving people. It seemed that when people were involved the farm really came to life – this began with volunteer weekends, where people came from across the country to help. The sweet chestnut fence you passed by on your way to the community garden was built by volunteers in 2004, as was the pig ark in 2010. Our volunteers have also built the compost toilet, planted trees, built raised beds and many other items you will see on your walk today.

Pass through the community garden and walk straight on, passing the Gloucester Old Spot pigs on your left, until you reach the top of the valley bank.

Twisting below you, the River Tern marks Fordhall's boundary. To your left was the field Müller intended to develop. Now deleted from the Council development plans, this field is safe. However, as the Fordhall Community Land Initiative does not own it, it is still at risk from development in the future. We are all keeping a close eye on this, as the field is vital to Ben's outdoor Foggage farming system (see Ben's walk for more information).

The pioneering community ownership scheme created to purchase Fordhall Farm in 2006 is called the Fordhall Community Land Initiative (FCLI). It is a community-benefit society set up to involve the community in the



saving of the farm. After receiving the option to purchase the farm in 2005 and legalising our society, we had less than six months to raise a staggering £800,000. We set up the Fordhall Community Land Initiative and began to sell shares at £50 each, selling them to everyone we met! The shares are not-for-profit and are still available to buy (more information in the farm shop). Today over 8,000 community members own Fordhall.

The FCLI now rent the farmhouse and land to Ben, as the tenant farmer, whilst the FCLI also uses the land for 'community benefit' through events, volunteering weekends and educational activities.

But how did all this happen?

Continue your walk along the top of the bank to the right, bearing to the left side of the hedge ahead. Just past the hedge, you will come to a large panel on your left.

The volunteer weekends at Fordhall began to build momentum with great achievements. You can see that trees have been planted in the area behind this gate; the results of a volunteer weekend in February 2006. At that time, we still had to raise over £770,000 towards the £800,000 needed by 1st July 2006! But by opening the farm gate and involving the local and wider community, the network grew and with it the momentum of the campaign. This involvement was the key to our success of securing Fordhall.



breeding to ensure that some calves are also born in the autumn, but those cows are fed additional grain through the winter, which Fordhall cows are not.

Follow the winding River Tern. Look out for damselflies and ducks as you walk. Go over the oak bridge and recycled plastic boardwalk, built by volunteers in 2010.

You are now walking through the Little Meadow. This is one of our wettest areas on the farm. The stream you crossed over provides water for our cattle and sheep, as well as providing a wonderful wildlife habitat. We do not drain our wetlands, because they are a rare habitat for wildlife and nesting birds. Even the little pools of water you will see, created by the hooves of the cattle, provide a habitat for small invertebrates and flies. Every part of my farm is used by nature, just as much as it is used to produce food.

There are many fish in the river to your left, including Gudgeon and Brown Trout, and you may even see some ducks or otters if you are quiet.

At the end of the boardwalk, turn right and follow the ditch on your left towards the farm. At the end of the ditch, bear right, across the field through the farm gate and up left towards the large tree trunks in the field.

There are many natural springs in this area of the walk, making the ground very uneven. It is only suitable for those steady on their feet and with suitable footwear.

Did you know that sheep are pregnant for only 5 months?



Head back to the farm and perhaps enjoy an ice cream in the farm shop. All my meat is sold here, online or through catering events. Ever since Charlotte and I took on Fordhall we have survived by selling our produce direct to you. We appreciate your support and loyalty - you keep us farming.

The bank you are walking up is where our sheep and cows graze during the winter. On small areas of the path, you may see the sand poking through. These banks on the farm are pure sand. This helps our cows and sheep stay out all year round, because the rain flows through the ground very easily and into the rivers below, keeping the hills nice and dry during the wet winter months.

Unlike most farms, our cows only eat grass, thanks to a system called Foggage Farming (developed by my late father, Arthur Hollins), which relies on all the aspects of our farm that you have seen today. I will always be grateful for my fathers' work – he has given me the fertility and diversity within my pastures to have a healthy and sustainable farming system.

Did you know that cows are pregnant for 9 months, just like people?

Thank you for visiting Fordhall.

Why not take Charlotte's or Arthur's Walk on your next visit, and learn more about Fordhall? England's first community-owned farm Telephone; 01630 638969



Ben's Walk



Follow the story of how Ben runs Fordhall Farm. What do his cows eat? How is he helping his pigs? And find out what Foggage Farming is all about?

A 30-45 minute Walk

Important: Wellingtons are needed on this walk.



Hi, my name's Ben and I am the tenant farmer at Fordhall Farm. It is my job to make sure all the animals are healthy and happy. I grew up at Fordhall and I love farming.

You will learn lots more about how I farm at Fordhall as you walk through our beautiful meadows.

Begin your walk through to the Community Garden.

As you walk towards the Community Garden, you will see my free-range Gloucester Old Spot pigs on the left – these are the white ones with black spots. You may see some other rare breed pigs on your way. I breed these traditional rare breeds because they grow much slower, which adds flavour, plus they love being outside. We normally have between three and five mother pigs (called sows) on the farm and one male pig (a boar), plus all their babies (piglets). How many can you see?



Did you know that sows are pregnant for exactly 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days?

Why not stop to have your picnic in the Pig Ark or at one of the tables in our community garden.



Pass through the community garden and head straight on until you reach the valley bank.

You are now walking through the house field and will pass

several fruit trees to the left. Pigs naturally root in the ground to find worms, insects and roots to munch on and I rotate our pigs around the paddocks, so each area gets turned over well whilst they are there. As a result, I wanted to help protect the soil in these areas a little better.

Fortunately, a bequest from a shareholder in 2009, has allowed us to begin to plant an orchard in these paddocks. All the trees are varieties of traditional apple and I hope that if the pigs keep out of the boxes, they provide shade in the summer, fruit for the pigs during the autumn, organic matter for the soil in the winter and beautiful blossom in the spring.

The buildings that you pass here are all ex-military buildings used during the war. They may not be pretty, but they are the most solid buildings on the farm and so our pigs make great use of them.

The River Tern, which you can see below the bank, is the boundary of Fordhall. As you follow the trail, you will be parallel to the river. We have otters in this stretch of the river, so, if you're quiet, you may see one...

Continue your walk along the top of the bank, bearing to the left side of the hedge.

You will pass many brambles below the bank to your left. These brambles are a wonderful place in which wildlife can hide, and are popular with butterflies, birds and even us when we harvest the blackberries in the autumn! Sometimes the sheep get a bit adventurous and get their wool stuck in the brambles, so I have to keep my eye on this area!

As you pass the hedge, look at how it is woven - this is called hedge laying. It is a very traditional technique used by farmers to thicken a hedge, encourage the growth and use it as a stock-proof fence. Our hedge has been fenced off from the livestock to protect it whilst it thickens and to provide a haven for wildlife such as field mice and hedgehogs.

Follow the trail through the two gates into the woodland. You will pass the sign on the left which shows the very brief story of how I changed one landlord for 8000! By involving the community and selling shares (more on Charlotte's walk)

There are beautiful bluebells in here during the spring. This woodland space also provides shelter for my cattle and sheep during the cold winter months. If you follow the arrows over this Norman Ring-work and Bailey site, you will come to a bench at the top of the hill. From here, you can see the far boundary of Fordhall. The large bank to the right is our far field – the Dutch barn field, just above the long meadow down near the river

Continue your walk down the hill through both the wicket and large gate on the left. Follow the arrow across to the river Tern.

You are now walking across the Broad Meadow. This is where my cattle and sheep graze in the summer. This flat ground near the river is prone to flooding and can get quite wet; however, this also means that even in dry summers, the grass stays lush and green, and I bring my livestock to graze this ground during the dry summer months.

The brown and white cows are Herefords and the black cows are Aberdeen Angus. These are traditional British breeds of cow, which means they grow more slowly, and are nice and hardy during the winter – perfect for our outdoor grazing system. As a result, we have to farm with the seasons. For the same reasons that most of nature's young are born in the spring, so are Fordhall's calves and lambs. This is because food becomes more abundant as the grass begins to grow fast again. Some farmers will time





You are now walking across the Broad Meadow. This is where Ben's cattle and sheep graze in the summer. If you turn around and look behind you, you

will see how well suited the Ringwork and Bailey site is to keep off unwanted visitors. This site was chosen as the ideal place to live by Norman armies, with a timber castle on the top, and the farming families living in the woodland next door. A perfect location for spotting intruders coming up the valley, don't you think?

When you get to the river, follow the twists and turns to the right.

I was determined to move Fordhall away from chemical fertiliser to a system which used the natural systems of Mother Earth to produce food - systems which were alive. This is organic farming. I spent many years collecting lots of different species of grasses and herbs for our pastures. As you walk across this meadow you will see many different types of grasses and herbs – how many can you count?

The rich fields mean that Ben's cattle and sheep have a varied and healthy diet, just like you when you eat all your fruit and vegetables. It helps Ben keep his cattle and sheep healthy, using a farming system which relies on nature, not oil, to produce food – but you will have to take Ben's walk to read more about this!

Follow the winding River Tern. Go over the oak bridge and recycled plastic boardwalk built by volunteers in 2010.

Look out for damselflies and other wildlife as you walk. All these different types of wildlife keep our farm healthy. How many different types of wildlife can you spot on your walk today? How many birds, butterflies, insects or worms? The alder trees along the river edge provide another haven for wildlife. In fact, my wife Connie loves to get inside one of the trees – can you find Connie's tree?

At the end of the board walk you need to go over the second oak bridge and continue to follow the River Tern. If you come across an electric fence, find the black handle to unhook it and walk through.

If you look to the left you will see an otter holt made on one of the farms volunteer weekends. As you follow the river bank along the Long Meadow, you may see other signs of our otters, such as otter poo (spraints) or footprints. You may even be lucky to see an otter, but you will have to be very quiet.

Eventually you will see an orange marker directing you right. Go over the stream and bear left up the bank towards the large metal gate. Go through the gate and follow the fence on the right hand side.

The bank you are walking along is where Ben's sheep and cattle graze during the winter. He uses a system I developed called Foggage Farming. The many different grasses and herbs that I spent my lifetime collecting allow Ben to keep his cattle and sheep outdoors all year round (in addition to our very sandy soils), enabling them to eat nothing but organic grass. It means that his animals grow a bit slower, so that they have a longer life on the farm, plus it provides us with better tasting meat at the end! I love the views of Fordhall from here!

You will come across a cluster of trees surrounding some natural springs. Walk through this being careful of uneven ground. Go through the gate on the other side. Head towards the yurts, through the large gate on the right and up to the oak trunks in the middle of the field, then return to the farm for a well-deserved snack.

Whilst Ben is the farmer, my daughter, Charlotte, through the Fordhall Community Land Initiative, uses the fields and woodlands to benefit the community and teach future generations about the importance of our food and our landscape

Thank you for visiting Fordhall. Why not take Charlotte's or Ben's Walk on your next visit, and learn more about us? England's first community-owned farm



Follow the story of how Arthur used organic farming to save Fordhall from bankruptcy over 65 years ago.

A 60-90 minute Walk



Hi my name's Arthur.

I am Charlotte and Ben's father, and although I sadly died in 2005, I still keep a watchful eye on all things at Fordhall. I grew up at Fordhall and I loved farming. In 1929, when I was only 14 years old, my father suddenly passed away and I left school to take over the farm with my mother. My father had ruined the land with chemical fertiliser and intensive farming, so I spent the rest of my life trying to rebuild the fertility within Fordhall's poor soils to save our farm from bankruptcy.



Begin your walk through to the Community Garden.

As you walk towards the Community Garden you will see Ben's free-range Gloucester Old Spot pigs on the left – these are the white ones with black spots. You will also be able to see that the ground they are rooting through is quite sandy. Most of our soils are like this at Fordhall, and when I was young my father ploughed the land a great deal. This means he used a machine on the back of a tractor to overturn the soil, to be able to plant his vegetable crops, just like you might dig up your garden. However, because our soils are so light and sandy, each time he did this, lots of vital nutrients were washed out of our soil and lost to the rivers. When I took on Fordhall with my mother back in 1929, the farm was in debt and in a poor state; my father had ruined the land and there was nothing in our soils left to feed the vegetables.

Pass through the Community Garden and go straight ahead until you reach the valley bank.

The buildings that you pass on your way are all ex-military buildings used during the war when I was a boy. I think they were used to manage electricity to the army base across the valley. They may not be pretty, but they are the most solid buildings on the farm and so Ben's pigs now make great use of them!

Above the trees to your left you will also see Müller Dairy. They are a multinational yoghurt-making company who began in Germany; if you go on Charlotte's walk, you will

hear more about how they started the downfall of Fordhall Farm in the 1990's - quite ironic, as I was actually one of the first yoghurt producers in England myself!

I began the yoghurt business with my wife May in 1957, to help us make a little more money from our dairy herd. We were one of the few yoghurt producers at the time and we sold it right across the country, from the large department stores such as Selfridge's and Lewis's to the small markets. However, this business came to an end in the late 1970's when May was tragically killed in a car accident. It was a strange coincidence that a yoghurt factory should later move next door and be the cause of our landlord trying to evict us.

I ran a dairy at Fordhall for most of my farming life and this allowed us to make our yoghurts and cream cheeses, but after May's death, I closed the dairy and moved over to beef farming. I later met and married Connie, and soon after Ben and Charlotte were born. I was 67 when Charlotte was born, and 69 when Ben was born, so organic life was doing me good!

As you approach the bank you will see the River Tern, which is the northeast boundary of Fordhall. As you follow the trail, you will be walking parallel to the river – a route that I took many times as a boy and later as the farmer at Fordhall.

Continue your walk along the top of the bank, bearing to the left side of the hedge ahead.

Be careful that you don't stand in any cow pats! I was always on my hands and knees investigating cow pats – I don't think Ben and Charlotte always appreciated it – but



the life in the cow pats is what keeps our farm going; it is the factory of our farm.

Did you know that there are more different species of life in one teaspoon of soil than there are people on the planet? Now that is a lot.

Follow the trail through the gate into the woodland.

This woodland is the area that saved our farm from bankruptcy during the Second World War. As mother and I continued to plough and grow vegetables, I noticed that they were getting weaker every year, so I kept adding more chemical fertiliser – just as my father had. But this didn't work, AND it was costing me money. The vital nutrients were being washed out of our sandy fields - we had to find a different way.

I was walking in this woodland one day and I got down on my hands and knees and I saw life deep below the surface. It seemed that this was what was keeping our woodland so healthy, and it was this life that was missing from my exposed chemically-farmed fields adjacent. If there is no life in the soil, then there is nothing to keep the soil healthy and it dies. I learnt that a dead soil cannot grow healthy vegetables and chemical fertiliser is expensive. From then on I encouraged the life back into my soils. I covered the soil to protect the life from harmful sunlight and I let nature do the rest, because nature does indeed know best.

I knew that the life in the soil, if fed with lots of lovely organic matter, such as cow pats, would come back into

my soils and in turn provide the food that was needed to grow the plants above the surface, just as I had seen in the woodland. Why don't you have a look? I bet you find some creepy crawlies or maybe even a worm or two if you go deep enough.

Continue your walk over the Ringwork and Bailey site down the hill, and through the wicket gate and left to the large gate in the field. Follow the arrow across to the river.