



a Wimble-don't  
 BLEDON was, quite rightly,  
 our Best of Britain competi-  
 (y 6). Compared with other  
 naments, it still insists on the  
 ndards in competitors' dress,  
 so sure about the officials'  
 The Wimbledon supplier,  
 has always designed its high-  
 nes as a pastiche on British  
 ome of the outfits this year  
 y an exaggerated caricature.  
 ong with using British des-  
 homy Snook, West Sussex



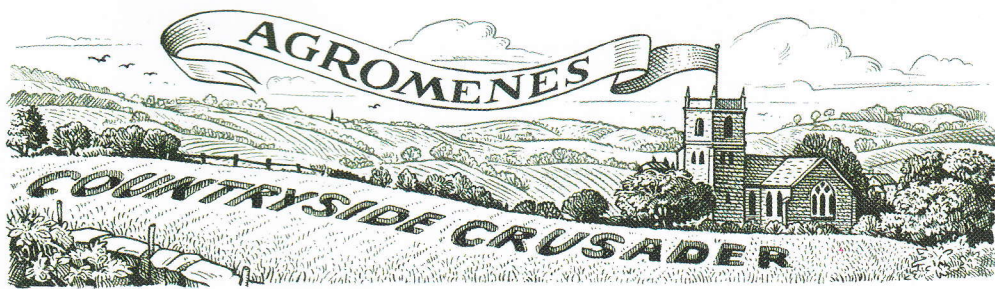
acquaintances  
 ry interested by the houses  
 r property-market section  
 (above, July 20). Indeed,  
 ely to see them both on the  
 e as my family used to live  
 rd, before moving to Ffynone.  
 t have had a good eye for  
 itecture!  
 ra Elletson, Wiltshire

## COUNTRY LIFE AUGUST 3

Nature's cliffhangers:  
 our coastal flowers,  
 a bluffer's guide  
 to the Rio Olympics,  
 entreath's favourite  
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# Life goes on— but for how long?

**A**FTER three tumultuous weeks, when news has actually been news, the uncertainty remains. Rarely has it been harder to chart the future or even read the runes. Yet here in the countryside, the continuing rhythm of life brings a stability that has never been more welcome. Despite doubts about agricultural support and increasing fears for farm incomes, the seasons don't stop. The hay has to be cut and the wheat harvested, so we get on with life, the annual round is repeated and the concerns of Theresa May and Angela Merkel seem a world away.

For Agromenes, haymaking has been in full swing. The clanking of old-fashioned balers, gathering the cut grass, continues well on into the evening with urgency and a determination to bring it all in, dry and safe from the threatened thunderstorms. It's a really good harvest this year. All that rain and then the piercing heat have meant the meadows have given of their best.

Haymaking is always a joyous time, but there's a special delight when you can spot the evidence of someone's good husbandry, which has brought fertility back to fields that have been ill-used for years. Just up the road, where the land runs down to the river, there's one such field that's long been a sorry sight. The victim of 'horseyculture', it had been eaten almost to extinction. Horses are such dreadful grazers; eating some patches until they're not much more than dust and leaving their muck on others so the nettles and thistles grow with abandon. It's a nuisance moving them around and cleaning up after them and some owners who wouldn't dream of neglecting their animals seem to think the land will look after itself.

Spied over ill-kempt hedges, the horses were a delight. Well groomed and cared for, they were a credit. But the land! Oh, the land.

A crown bare of grass, cropping only thistles and any fresh growth, even in the most fertile pieces, eaten down to the roots. However, this year, that miserable field looks splendid. Three seasons without horses and careful management of the cows that replaced them, together with the specially favourable weather, and it's simply beautiful. Best, of course, when there were still the bales of hay, not yet loaded onto a trailer, but, even now, shorn of its crop, glowing with health in the July sunshine.

That one field reminds us just how resilient Nature is. Some spot weedkiller, no fertiliser and proper management and it all comes back. However, it isn't easy. It's time, effort and knowledge. And we desperately need more

**‘We're going to have to ask farmers to spend money and time on better land husbandry,’**

of it—the fertility of almost all our soil is in serious decline. Decades of relatively cheap nitrates, over-use of herbicides and insecticides and widespread monoculture have left most of England significantly less fertile. It happens almost imperceptibly. As, each year, the soil itself is less

productive, we have compensated with more fertiliser and new strains of wheat and other crops. Only now, as the evidence mounts, have leading farmers begun to be concerned.

It's a worldwide problem, but, for these small islands, which will have to grow much more of their own food, it's seriously threatening. Agriculture is denuded of labour. Jobs that can't be mechanised are overwhelmingly done by migrants. Farm incomes are stretched. It's in that context that we're going to have to ask farmers to spend money and time on better land husbandry. Defra has no plan for it and, so far, little appetite to produce one, yet soil fertility is essential for our farming future. Has anyone told Andrea Leadsom?



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