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Valerie captures the



Stacking bales in the barn, by Valerie Mather



Sheep shearing on a Brandale farm, by Valerie Mather

FIELDS, Folds and Farming Life, Nunnington Hall's exhibition by Yorkshire documentary, travel and portrait photographer Valerie Mather, captures candid moments from a year in the lives of upland farmers in Brandale on the North York Moors.

"Photography has the power to capture a moment in history, and my hope is that these images speak a picture of the work, devotion and joy of these local farming families and communities today," says Valerie, a former lawyer. "I wish to share some of the joy and inspiration about farming and rural life I discovered from my year in Brandale."

Brandale, one of the North York Moors' most isolated valleys with high moors on all sides, is cared for by the landranger-led farmers, the National Trust and its volunteers alongside the National Park authority.

The combination of Valerie's work and recently produced films and artwork reveals the hard work and determination of the farming community in navigating the ever-changing agricultural world to achieve a better farming future for people, the environment and wildlife.

HERE Valerie answers Charles Hutchinson's questions on photography, farmers and the future of farming. **Speaking with the Downland family, from Moor House, Brandale, their first concern was whether you would be getting in the way of their daily routine, but they grew quickly to enjoy your visits. "Oh, yeah, at the breakfast table again? How do you build up that bond of trust with your subjects, especially when farmers can be taciturn?"**

"I think the greatest moment of the project (photograph goes along way beyond the getting jargon controllable also, helping out where needed) happened on a gathering of around 300 sheep from the moor when one of the farmers was struggling, exhausted by his farm, the young son."

These things go unmentioned in the Open and All Creatures Great And Small series, how have you set about changing those perspectives/misconceptions? "Documentary photography is, for me, all about genuinely candid, unscripted moments.



Documentary photographer Valerie Mather spent a year filming at Brandale. Pictures: Laura Kennedy

as opposed to posed portraits. There is no makeup or dress rehearsal. I am inspired by certain spaces and one of my favorites is by Paul Capra's. It's one thing to make a picture of what a person looks like, it's another thing to make a portrait of who they are. That is what interests me as a photographer, no matter how much longer I take in order to capture a genuine moment."

Where does a traditional Yorkshire moorland farming community fit into increasingly fractured, no-ones-off-constantly-uprove Britain?

"I was initially drawn to document the farming community in my area when I attended a local agricultural show in the summer of 2018 and witnessed what a strong sense of community farms around."

"These documentary photographs play an important role, telling stories and allowing us an insight into communities other than our own. Though that we can hopefully appreciate how we all have a place in the world and have a greater understanding of the people of it."

What do you learn from your previous upland farming photography project

that you could put to good effect in this upland series?

"Patience and paying my energy levels. Farmers work long hours and staying in the moment requires concentration, otherwise something magical happens and you miss it. Use the light of a lens for inspiration."

The bond between farmer and stock and farmer and land are both central to your exhibition. Discuss...

"One young farmer told me that he had spent a year working abroad and then had to go back to his Yorkshire, but eventually he had to return to the Brandale valley he was born in. He used the phrase that he was 'homed to the land'."

Whether you are both still in or not, it's my experience, farming is a vocation and not simply a job.

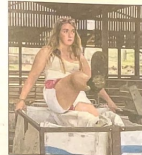
What did you discover in your upland farming encounters that most surprised you?

"I was surprised to learn that having a mix of cattle and sheep grazing on fields adjacent to moorland produces an ideal environment for groundhealing birds by producing both long and short grass. Undergrazing isn't enough."

Feeding sheep in the snow on the Brandale moorland, by Valerie Mather

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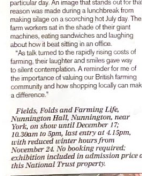
heart of farming life



On duty in the sheep pens, by Valerie Mather



Smiles in the show ring, by Valerie Mather, from FIELDS, Folds and Farming Life



Attention to detail when preparing a sheep for showing, by Valerie Mather



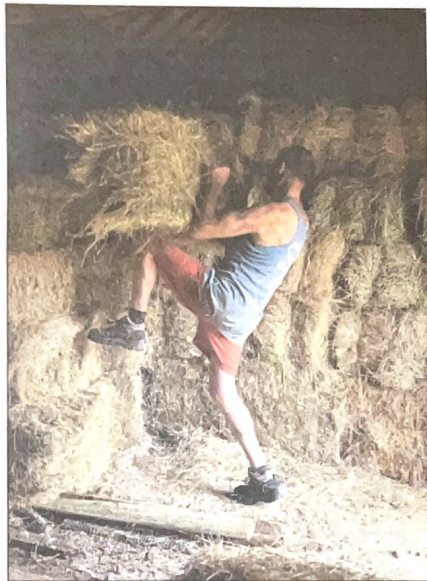
The peering and the peering: the boys of showing sheep start young, by Valerie Mather

FIELDS, Folds and Farming Life, Nunnington Hall, Nunnington, near York, is open until December 17, 10.30am to 5pm, last entry at 4.15pm, with reduced admission hours from November 24. No booking required. Exhibitions included in admission price at this National Trust property.



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Stacking bales in the barn, by Valerie Mather



Sheep shearing on a Bransdale farm, by Valerie Mather

FIELDS, Folds and Farming Life, Nunnington Hall's exhibition by Yorkshire documentary, travel and portrait photographer Valerie Mather, captures candid moments from a year in the lives of upland farmers in Bransdale on the North York Moors.

"Photography has the power to capture a moment in history, and my hope is that these images paint a picture of the spirit, stoicism and joy of these local farming families and communities today," says Valerie, a former lawyer. "I wish to share some of the joy and inspiration about farming and nature that I discovered from my year in Bransdale."

Bransdale, one of the North York Moors' most isolated valleys with high moors on all sides, is cared for by the tenant-custodian farmers, the National Trust and its volunteers alongside the National Park authority.

The combination of Valerie's work and specially produced films and artwork reveals the hard work and determination of the farming community in navigating the ever-changing agricultural world to achieve a better farming future for people, the environment and wildlife.

HERE Valerie answers Charles Hutchinson's questions on photography, farmers and the future of farming.

Speaking with the Dowsland family, from Moor Houses, Bransdale, their first concern was whether you would be 'getting in the way of their daily routines', but they grew quickly to enjoy your visits. "Oh, Val's at the breakfast table again"! How do you build up that bond of trust with your subjects, especially when farmers can be taciturn?!

"I think being genuinely interested in the people I photograph goes a long way towards getting people comfortable. Also, helping out where needed. I helped out on a gathering in of some 300 sheep from the moor when one of the families was shorthanded, instructed by Nathan, their young son!"

If the two public views of farmers are that they are either "problematic" or "like on Channel 5" in the Amanda Owen and All Creatures Great And Small series, how have you set about changing those perspectives/misconceptions?

"Documentary photography is, for me, all about genuinely candid unposed moments,



Documentary photographer Valerie Mather spent a year filming at Bransdale. Picture: Laura Kennedy

as opposed to posed portraits. There is no make-up or dress rehearsal! I am inspired by certain quotes and one of my favourites is by Paul Caponigro: 'It's one thing to make a picture of what a person looks like, it's another thing to make a portrait of who they are'. That is what interests me as a photographer, no matter how much longer it takes in order to capture a genuine moment."

Where does a traditional Yorkshire moorland farming community fit into increasingly fractured, no-sense-of-community-anymore Britain?

"I was initially drawn to document the farming community in my area when I attended a local agricultural show in the summer of 2019 and witnessed what a strong sense of community there is amongst farmers."

"I think documentary photography plays an important role, telling stories and allowing us an insight into communities other than our own. Through that we can hopefully appreciate how we all have a place in the world and have a greater understanding of other points of view."

What did you learn from your previous lowland farming photography project

that you could put to good effect in this upland series?

"Patience and pacing my energy levels. Farmers work long hours and staying in the moment requires concentration, otherwise something magical happens and you miss it, like the birth of a lamb for example."

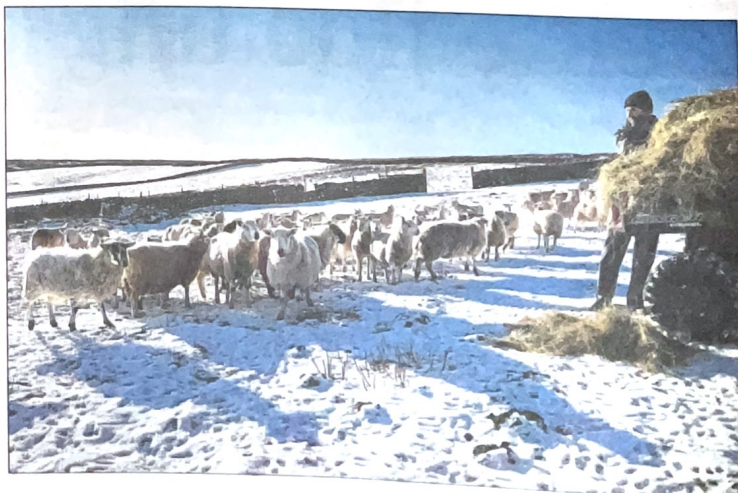
The bond between farmer and stock and farmer and land are both central to your exhibition. Discuss...

"One young farmer told me that he had spent a year working abroad and then lived for a spell in Kirkbymoorside, but eventually he had to return to the Bransdale valley he was born in. He used the phrase that he was 'hefted to the land'."

"Whether you are born into it or not, in my experience, farming is a vocation and not simply a job."

What did you discover in your upland farming encounters that most surprised you?

"I was surprised to learn that having a mix of cattle and sheep grazing on fields adjacent to moorland produces an ideal environment for ground-nesting birds by producing both long and short grass. Under-grazing (not enough



Feeding sheep in the snow on the Bransdale moorland, by Valerie Mather

heart of farming life



On duty in the sheep pens, by Valerie Mather

livestock) or abandonment of pasture (no livestock at all) can lead to dense thatch, which is unsuitable for the endangered Curlew to nest amongst. Which means: no cattle, no Curlew."

What is the future of upland farming?

"With only three per cent of farmers under the age of 35, our farming future is precarious across the country. Indeed, it was those alarming statistics that made me want to see for myself what life was like for smaller farmers in and around Yorkshire.

"Upland farmers have an important role to play in nature-friendly farming and the farmers I spent time with were actively engaged, for example, with breeding conservation initiatives for the endangered ground-nesting birds, such as the Lapwing and the Curlew."

Do you have a favourite photograph in the exhibition?

"My personal reactions to the images are, of course, coloured by the emotions I felt when pressing the shutter each time and the engagement with my subjects on that particular day. An image that stands out for that reason was made during a lunchbreak from making silage on a scorching hot July day. The farm workers sat in the shade of their giant machines, eating sandwiches and laughing about how it beat sitting in an office.

"As talk turned to the rapidly rising costs of farming, their laughter and smiles gave way to silent contemplation. A reminder for me of the importance of valuing our British farming community and how shopping locally can make a difference."

Fields, Folds and Farming Life, Nunnington Hall, Nunnington, near York, on show until December 17; 10.30am to 5pm, last entry at 4.15pm, with reduced winter hours from November 24. No booking required; exhibition included in admission price at this National Trust property.



Attention to detail when preparing a sheep for showing, by Valerie Mather



Smiles in the show ring, by Valerie Mather, from Fields, Folds and Farming Life



The yearning and the yawning: the joys of showing sheep start young, by Valerie Mather