

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Richard Brooks

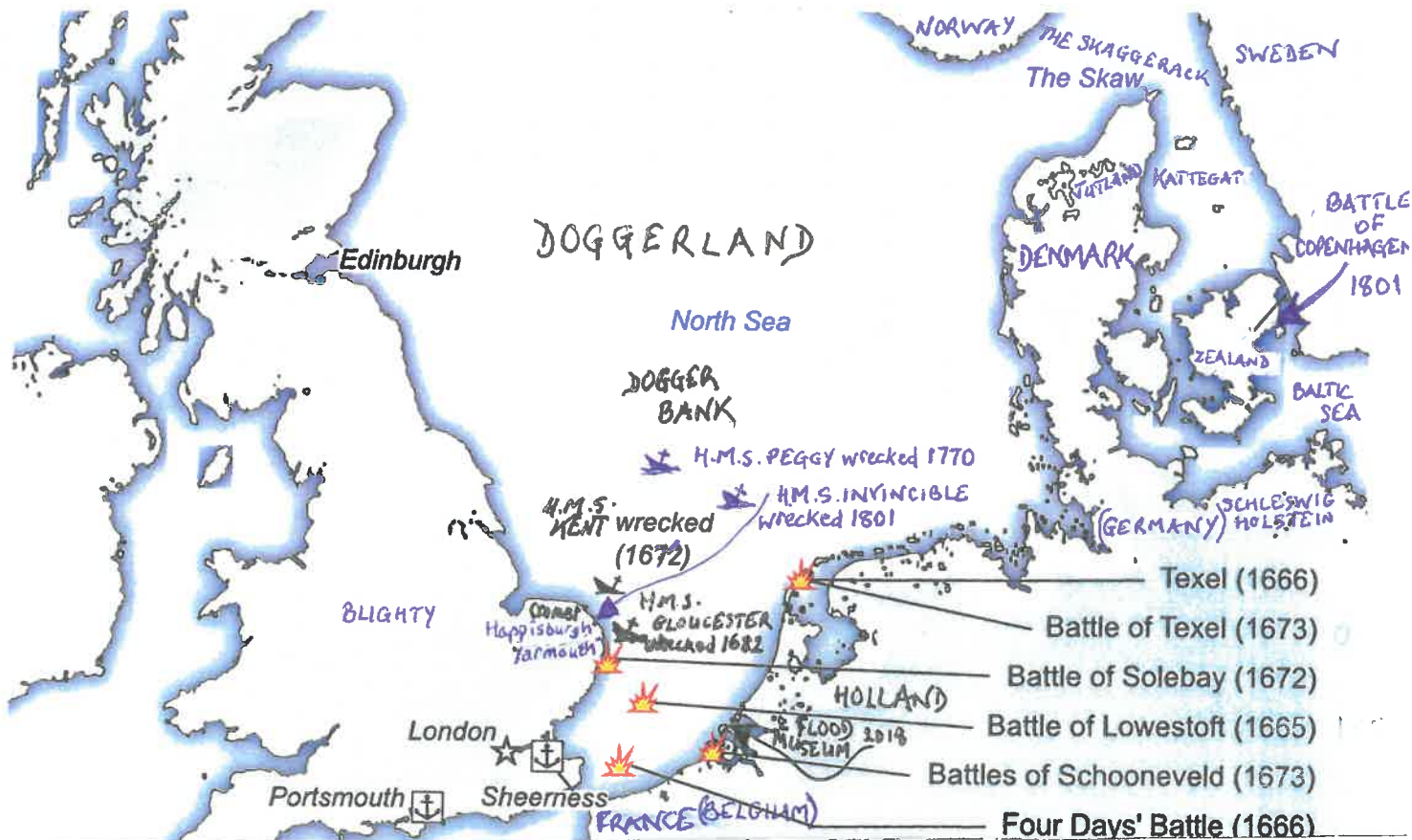
Chairman: Pat Cubitt

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CLUB MATTERS Valentine's 2023

I'm pleased to hear of some interest among you in the HMS Gloucester suggestion and I have an update on the local marine history. In 1724 Daniel Defoe, who knew a thing or two about shipwrecks, was travelling past Happisburgh *en route* from Yarmouth to Cromer. He "*was surprised to see in all the way from Winterton, that the farmers and country people had scarce a barn or a shed, or a stable, nay, not the pales of their yards and gardens, not a necessary-house, but what was built old planks, beams, wales and timbers etc. the wrecks of ships and ruins of mariners' and merchants' fortunes*". The Specialist Lem Putts and other local shed builders were able to restock in 1770 when HMS Peggy, an 8 gun naval sloop that was following the brig Little Dick to Yarmouth, ground ashore onto Happisburgh beach in a winter storm. 32 sailors, more than a third of the ship's company, were drowned and are buried in Happisburgh churchyard.



Worse was to come in 1801 when HMS Invincible, a Third Rate with 74 guns, put out of Yarmouth Roads with 600 men to join 'local lad done good' Vice Admiral Nelson and the Baltic fleet prior to the Battle of Copenhagen. She was forced off course and struck Hammond's Knoll, a sandbank just east of Haisbro Sand, where over two thirds of the crew were lost including the captain. Nelson was still able to defeat the Danish fleet in what he called his hardest fought victory. This was when he chose to ignore the instruction to "leave off action" from his commander-in-chief Admiral Sir Hyde Parker by putting the telescope to his blind eye. After the battle he visited 'his men' from the Invincible who had survived in Yarmouth hospital but about 400 had been lost 119 of whom were buried pell-mell in Happisburgh churchyard. 6 more were buried at Winterton along with one Thomas Ansell who had drunk himself to death from a washed up brandy cask. Although an attempt was made to provide a memorial in Edwardian times by Sir Samuel Hoare of Sidstrand Hall, Reverend A Hitchcock and Mrs Mary Cator it was almost 200 years before a modest stone slab was laid in 1998 "to so many of Nelson's gallant men".



While our gaze has been drawn eastwards to the disaster on the Turkey / Syria border and the ongoing war in the Ukraine we can gain insights from the West Country. The Farming Community Network is another of the charities offering support to farmers and their families who run into problems and operates in conjunction with the Addington Fund and Forage Aid on 03000 111 999. Their Devon representative wangs on about wellies and presents a Christian perspective on the way through the morass. Don't forget that RABI are still very much there to help on 0800 188 4444 as are **Michael Pollitt's** YANA on 0300 323 0400. It was Benjamin Leader, a man of Worcester, who painted this evocative scene although February, to date, has been a month of frosts rather than floods. Thirdly my ex spy friend from Gloucestershire has provided his update on the Ukrainian situation:-

On Ukraine, a lot of uncertainties, the Russians are unlikely to give up and are putting considerably better effort into attempting to properly train at least 150,000 of the mobilised personnel - including in combined arms operations which they were so bad at during the initial invasion, at least in the attempt to take Kiev. They were truly shambolic and made some of the most fundamental mistakes. - which was the single greatest factor in Ukrainian successes. The Russians have recognised these failings and are attempting to correct them (Putin listed the lessons identified in a December speech and told the military to get it sorted). Now concentrated in the Donbass and south, it seems likely that they will mount an offensive to improve their holdings there but timing is critical. They either have to go before the Rasputitsa (essentially the spring thaw) or wait until the ground dries out - a problem for them last year was that it was a mild winter and the ground never really froze. It looks like it was a harder winter this year so they may have a reasonable window before the Rasputitsa but it's a choice they have to make and a risk either way. They might be better going before the Rasputitsa said it will hinder a Ukrainian counter-attack. They may also be under pressure to do something before the latest Western offerings - mainly, but not only, the tanks - become operational (although that will take some time - maintenance and logistics will be a challenge).

The most obvious objectives of an offensive will be to clear the Donbass, secure the south, including the land bridge to the Crimea (and its water supply). This means holding the line of the Dnieper and clearing to a defensible line from the bend north to the Russian border. It seems much less likely that they will try for Kiev again as they need a 5 to 1 superiority in the Donbass and south and just don't have the troops to do the north as well. In an ideal world they would seek to get to the Dnieper along its full length in Ukraine and then go for a negotiated settlement that effectively divides Ukraine along the Dnieper. It would be a bold move to try it, given the failures of the attempt to do this last February and March. It would also likely require a fifth 'Group of Forces' - they have four committed currently from each of the 4 Military Districts. It is not clear where the additional forces and their associated command and control would come from or if one of the groups could be shifted - the Western Group of Forces is operating in the most northerly position and could, in theory, aimed for Kharkov but that would likely be a stretch and the commitment of the strategic reserve. The Russians could surprise us all but that's my best guess currently.

Worth bearing in mind that the Ukrainians tell as many porkies as the Russians - while a Russian offensive is highly likely (and to some extent it has already started) the suggestion that the Russians will go for Kiev again and have 600,000 troops, or whatever, may be intended to push the West into giving more kit, including aircraft, rather than an accurate summary of what is actually happening.

At 7.30 on Tuesday, 21st February we have Darren Gill to tell us about gun dogs and Martin Jensen will be updating us on his charity project and the situation out in the Ukraine. We also have Martin to thank for recruiting **Professor Graham Moore, Director of The John Innes Institute** to talk to us on **Tuesday, 14th March on plant technology - and mo(o)re ?** – for our final meeting of the season.

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For February fill-dyke and frost, suitable farm **footwear** is a must. As soon as my feet were big enough, I relished wearing for farm work my father's hob-nailed army **boots!** Designed to 'breathe' on long marches, they bettered **wellies** in hot weather, and required plenty of dubbin with elbow-grease to keep them waterproofed! However, **wellies/wellingtons** have become a symbol of farming in moist Devon and beyond. Of course, they are named after the first Duke of **Wellington** (1769-1852) following his victory at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium (1815) where he wore long leather **boots** up over the knee and topped with hessian. Subsequently, '**wellingtons**' are made of rubber, rubberised or synthetic waterproof materials. A photograph of a pair of **wellies** on a farmhouse doorstep, and evidently used among cattle, featured on the first FCN pocket-sized (DL) leaflet, kindly designed 30 years ago by a Devon farmer's wife and graphic artist. Above the **wellies** were the words: *Tough as old boots?...* and below them.. *I don't think so...* Inside was information on how FCN might help, and how to contact us. Recent reading of military history has revealed opinion that the turning point of **Wellington's** 1815 victory was at a group of high-walled **farm buildings** at Hougoumont near Waterloo – which had been a working **farm** for some 500 years already then. **Wellington** apparently claimed "the success of the battle turned upon closing the gates at Hougoumont". These were huge, heavy wooden **farmyard gates** enabling them to entrap & overcome the advancing enemy spearhead; tranquil farm buildings today conceal their past key role in securing freedom from the tyranny of Napoleon. What **farmstead** may prove pivotal in averting tyranny in our times, especially in **Ukraine**? What tyrannies of bureaucracy and other problems afflicting some **farmers** today may be averted by the Good Hand of God through FCN in our times? Peace-making is necessarily preceded by defeat of the enemy; winning the war enables establishing the peace. The key for all of us in our own personal and farm business 'battles' may be first to humbly admit that we are not '**as tough as old boots**' – or perhaps that we have taken **wrong paths** – and begin to receive the power and peace of God in thankful restoration or some resolution of our problems.

God's foot-soldiers need to be obedient, '**shod with the preparation of the Gospel [Good News] of Peace**' (Eph.6:15) – a key basis of the armour. Our **farming boots** need to prepare us for various weather and farmland conditions, and for varied FCN peace-making endeavours but also we each need wisdom to choose right **paths** and avoid wrong ones, as the Psalmist prayed: '**By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not**' (Psa.17:4,5). What a wonderful thing it is when we have earnestly prayed and sought to be 'in the right place at the right time' & God assures us: '**I have led you in right paths**' (Proverbs 4:11). May we seek the correct **footwear, paths** and **purposes** and **pray** as the hymn-writer J.E. Bode prays to The Lord Jesus Christ:-

'O let me see Thy footmarks & in them plant mine own; My hope to follow duly is in Thy strength alone'.

The route will be both rugged & smooth, wet & dry – not always easy but we are invited to trust God's promise: '**In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths**' (Proverbs 3:6).

Let us thank God for our **wellies!** for **hopeful paths**; for each other; for those we **help** via FCN; FCN nationally led by Jude McCann; farms/rural **communities**; our Founder Christopher Jones; our Patron HM King Charles III; UK Gov't/democracy, & Ag.Act **ELMS** measures ; NHS & Carers; Schools; Pharmacists; Water & Food suppliers/Chains & Food Security; transport; rural crime prevention; Vets.; vaccinations.

Let's pray for farming neighbours; Young Farmers; students; for the mentally-stressed, confused, lonely; for businesses, organisations, new roles & ventures; caution to 'stay alert!' & act responsibly; for social discipline to respect, protect, enjoy; for all who mourn; re Floods, Wildfires & Drought; Avian'flu - England: all poultry inside now; IDPs, refugees & destinations; migrants...

Let's pray re: Afghanistan; Australia, NZ, Canada, USA, Europe, Brazil; DR Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Israel, Jersey, Korea, Japan, Palestine; Yemen; Madagascar; Myanmar; Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Poland, Kenya, RSA, Somalia, Sudan, S.Sudan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tonga, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, **Ukraine**, Russia; Nordic & Baltic States; refugee-receivers, & NATO robust restraint

Let's pray, praise & help the needy, through Psa. 119:97-104; keep looking up! *John*

PS feel free to ring on 01626 873159 ejwibberley@btinternet.com