

# HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

*President:* Richard Brooks

*Chairman:* Martin Jensen

*Vice-Chairman:* Andrew Ross

[www.holtfarmers.club](http://www.holtfarmers.club)

## CLUB MATTERS April 2024

So much to look back on favorably. As ever I am indebted to my Stalham oppo **Michael Pollitt** for his prompt reporting on last week's **75th Dinner at Gresham's**. Thanks to **Pat Cubitt** this is already available on our website and includes photos, raffle winners and much more in the Newsletter folder. There was a time when one or two in our club disapproved of allowing 'the press' into our meetings for fear that our purported rivalry with Stalham was slightly juvenile and certain items were best kept private. However time, thirty years and counting, has shown that this was mistaken and Michael has been almost as valuable to Holt as he is now to Stalham. The Dinner was evidence of the mutual respect and friendship between the two clubs with many having ties to both. Appropriately a 'Nelson' of 111 diners including a Lord (Viscount Raynham), Baroness (Byford), Honoured Individuals, Ladies and Gentlemen attended in the grandeur of the historic Big School which contrasted with the modernist yet still impressive Dyson Building where the Champagne Reception was held. Without being rude to Michael I need to exercise a small amount of editorial control if you and he will permit :-

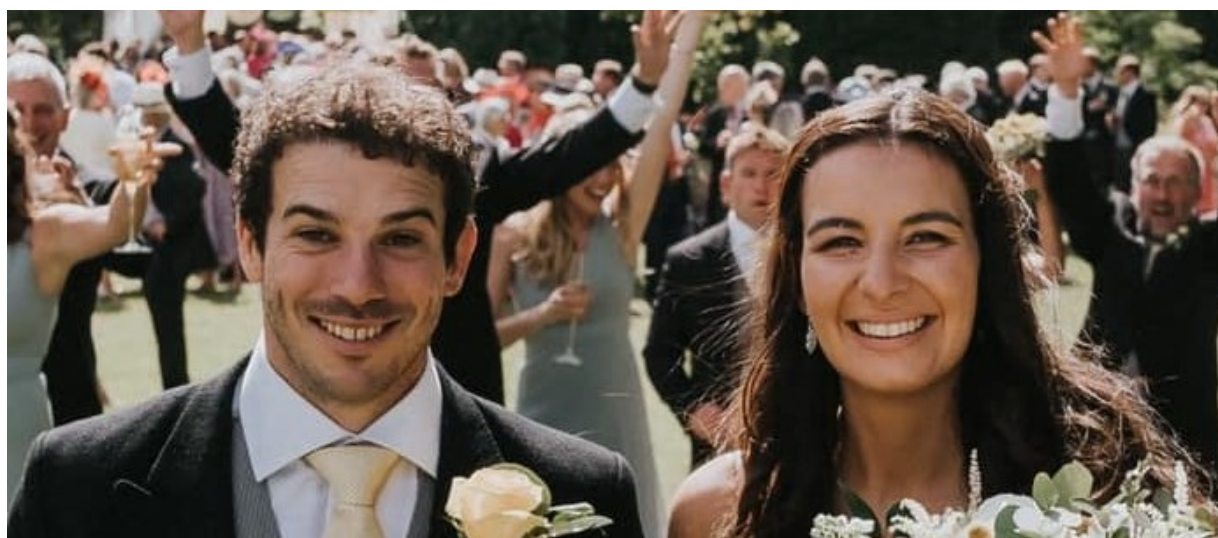


a. In 1948 Holt Club Rules prescribed that "Membership shall be confined to men connected with the farming industry and its allied trades and professions". Michael's claim that this was "jettisoned...only about five years ago" is out by a factor of about 10. While we may have only been able to attract a handful of lady members there has certainly been no bar on women for the four decades I have been involved with the club. Norfolk girl and Red Tractor 'driver' Christine Tacon was right to say a couple of years ago that she would not speak to a 'men only' club and it was gratifying that at least 40% of the diners last Thursday were ladies.

b. Both **Martin Jensen** as Chairman and **Peter Perry-Warnes** as Speaker were kind enough to compliment me on my long time as Club Secretary and I thank them sincerely along with those who endorsed that kind gesture. I would not continue if I stopped enjoying my role and I am very much ready to hand over to a younger and better candidate. A peruse of the Honours Board will disprove Michael's claim that I am the longest-serving Secretary as my predecessor, the indefatigable Peter Smith of Lloyds Bank colours, served 37 years which I do not expect to emulate.

c. Magisterially Michael combines the role of Stalham secretary with also being their Treasurer. This was the position at Holt until, a short while after I had taken over from Peter Smith, it became obvious that my accountancy skills were wanting. **Tony Williams** was rapidly recruited and managed our finances brilliantly over three decades. Having left Barclays he became NFU County Chairman and a County Councillor while overseeing his family's farm in Gloucestershire and playing many other roles such as a governor at Reepham High School. It was great to see him at the Dinner and he should have shared the plaudits that were directed my way. He did at least win a Celebration Box from Burn Valley Winery in the raffle.

d. Someone else whom we should thank and who only got a passing mention on the night is **Bill Poortvliet** who has invested more into this Club than anyone. He has come full circle since becoming a committee member in 1981 followed by 6 years as Chairman and then the same length of time as President before returning to the committee latterly. Bill has hosted Student Days and Farm Walks, organised golf matches and led us on trips at home and abroad - most notably to Hungary. It is good that his nephew **Bruce** - pictured with wife Bea - has now joined him on the committee but he will be hard pushed to match all that Bill has provided and achieved.



e. Then there is our current President **Richard Brooks** who was behind our Student Day successes even though their time has now passed. His experience as Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers has served us in good stead and often been an entrée into excellent visits to places like Elveden and Sir James Dyson's farming operation in Lincolnshire. He recruited Viscount Raynham for us and made the corn dolly which, appropriately, was won by **George Youngs** since dollies were seen as symbols of good luck and fertility. George is getting married in July.

f. George's father **William** was the chief co-ordinator for the Dinner showing the organisational skills he has shown on several of our foreign trips. It seems a shame that he appears to have been diverted from his ascent to Master in the wake of **Richard Brooks** but it was grand to have the Youngs family present in force including now full time farmer Tom.

g. We also welcomed **Bob King** who has now retired from Crisp Malt after, with **John Cragg** and then **Chris Borrett**, helping make our annual Malting Barley Competition such a success.



h. It was pleasing to see Tracey **Hughes** with her husband **Rob** having been our Student Day Supremo for several years. His old firm Brown & Co were generous sponsors of a raffle prize as were Larking Gowen under the auspices of our dynamic new Treasurer **Laurie Hill**. He is another getting married this summer along with **Sam Clabon** who is marrying Leah, **Peter Perry-Warnes's** daughter. We wish all three couples every happiness. I should just mention David Cunningham, Laurie's former colleague, who audited our accounts for many years and has moved on to pastures new - well, Cromer.

i. Michael also volunteered as photographer for the evening and caught Hazel **Hammond** holding her raffle prize of an oil painting of cattle in a meadow at Burgh-next-Aylsham painted by Broads artist Richard Jex-Waters. Her friend **Roy Vigus** is also captured but not Hazel's husband **Julian** with whom she farmed cattle in Lincolnshire before retiring to Gunthorpe. Coincidentally that is where another cattle man **Sandy Wallace** also retired to.

j. **Roger Hall** of Upwood, Baconsthorpe was also a cattle man although a dairy one. He has recently turned 90 which means he was a teenager when our club was first founded. He had been briefly evacuated to Newquay while at Gresham's and tells how horses were still very much in evidence in 1948 together with a large number of farm hands and generators as well.



k. **John McNeil Wilson**, slightly older than Roger, came across from West Norfolk around this time and paints a similar picture for his family's fruit farming and of course the daffodils which his son Robert continues to this day. John has provided the group photo at The Feathers in 1989 with him and Roger both present and Bill Poortvliet sitting proudly in the front row. Both of these venerable gentlemen told me they had enjoyed farming either side of the Cromer Ridge and the scale of the changes they have witnessed and been party to over 75 years must have been comparable with those over Turnip Townshend's career 300 years previously.

k. A poignant point was that our guest Jon **Pye**, the current Stalham Chairman is the son of **Eddie** (of Dix's Farm and Sygate near Cawston) and grandson of Clifford who was our Chairman in the 1980s until, sadly, dying in office to be succeeded by **Richard Harrison**.



l. Also **Ken Leggett** bravely attended after his wife Pat died last month. Few have done as much for farmers in Norfolk as Ken including running our initial Student Days without a computer. At 93 he is still a councillor and an Old Catton Park Runner.



m. Peter Pointen also has ties to both Stalham and Holt with Mr G Pointen having been one of our founder members. As an agronomist with Chemspec Peter also sponsored one of our raffle prizes.



n. It was serendipitous that Melinda Raker was on our top table as the founder of YANA - the beneficiary of our raffle - and won a bottle of champagne. She was made an MBE in the New Year's Honours List and her charity will gain at least £500 from the raffle.

o. **Martin Jensen** had bought a new suit and a top hat for the occasion although the head size wasn't big enough to draw the raffle tickets from and we had to resort to a pillowcase. We are all appreciative of what our new Chairman has accomplished in bringing this Dinner to fruition even if we were a few months late. Apart from all the demands of large scale arable farming in these dystopian times Martin has kept us briefed on his mercy missions to the Ukraine and is now finalising plans for our Trip to Sweden in 6 weeks' time. Apologies for not mentioning many others to whom we are indebted for making the Dinner a success and for helping the Club in so many ways over the decades but thanks go out to one and all.

*Tim*

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HOLT FARMERS CLUB 1989



ON TOUR IN HOLLAND 2018