

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Richard Brooks

Chairman: Martin Jensen

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www.holtfarmers.club

CLUB MATTERS July 2024

It was coincidental that I should have referred at the end of my last newsletter to **the Youngs** family across the tracks (now Marriott's Way) from **Chis Harrold's** Docking Farm. Cousins George and Tom have made recent headlines by winning the Aylsham Show's Norfolk County Farm Competition in succession to Raynham Farms. Having eschewed rigger Tom has assumed control of arable operations while his father **Nick** is retained for crop spraying. George is in charge of diversification with a livery now occupying the Frogs Hall buildings where we held our initial Student Days and they are applying for 6 lakeside lodges on Stourton Water, the lake where they have extraction rights when the dam holds. **William** has more or less joined his father Gerry in retirement while Jenny still runs Sankence Lodge. He and Nick could have walked to school when they attended Cawston College in the 1970s as could **Chris** and **Michael Harrold** while Tony Austin Fell and David 'Ronnie' Forster were contemporaries - **Matt Skinner** and Will Frazer (Aylsham auctioneer) came later along with Herbie Hide. I recommend a video on You Tube which follows Mr Forster's potential folly in converting the 85 foot high water tower that George Cawston built to supply The Manor House. He bought this off Gerry close to the store and pad which we sometimes used when gathering for coach trips; once the coach caught fire before it even reached us and another time someone locked William inside the store. I suspect that Ben may stick with rugby after he stops playing but I trust that his generation will play as large a part in our club's future as the older Youngs have.



Geo. Cawston's Water Tower 1897

Back to the big house, Cawston Manor, which was described as having been built in Elizabethan, Tudor, Tudorbethan, Dutch, English and Arts & Crafts architectural styles. After being used to house convalescent

soldiers in the First World War the Cawstons sold it to Mr Stourton who dammed the headwaters of The Mermaid and then it was owned by Col. Herbert MacDougall who clearly had sufficient dough. Disabled children were here during the Second World War and in 1964 it became Cawston College, part of the Woodard Foundation. There was a brave campaign to keep the school going but it closed in 1999 since when the property has had a troubled time. Initially it was used as a spiritual retreat until Chancellor Care ran it as a psychiatric hospital. Extraordinarily in 2006 David Prior, who had been North Norfolk's MP only 5 years earlier, was arrested for fraud as the non-executive chairman. Eventually he was able to clear his name and David Cameron made him a life peer in 2015 as Baron Prior of Brampton (the one in Suffolk rather than William Youngs's home village where the Roman Road from Billingford runs near here to the Bure). This was the same title his father had held after being Minister of Agriculture in Heath's government and 20 years later Gillian Shephard held the same post in Major's government and became Baroness Shephard of Northwold. A further 20 years on in 2014 it was Liz Truss's turn to fill the post and, whether or not she retains her seat on Friday, it is debatable whether she will end up as Baroness Truss of Thetford or Ten Mile Bank. Chancellors went bust in 2009 to be followed by a similar outfit called Jeasal who also had problems with three residents dying. Legal ramifications persist for both firms and after all these institutional uses it is reported that the accommodation is now in poor order.

Another sadness occurred in 2010 when Benjie Bulwer-Long of Heydon pulled off the this stretch of the B1154 and died after his doctor had failed to diagnose myocarditis; he was aged only 40. Close by is Stag's Leap, the name now given to one of a pair of semi-detached cottages on the Spa Lane junction. This is reputed to have been where, 200 years ago, a hunt put up a deer that led the hounds on a historic chase that covered 25 miles in 2 and a quarter hours. The hunt had met at the Cawston Woodrow and from Cawston Town the stag headed south to Hellesdon and on into the centre of Norwich to provide an amazing spectacle for the city folk. There is another lake in the 40 acre Warren Wood north of the road with a holiday complex including a 20m indoor heated pool named after The Mermaid which, after flowing through Stourton Water, then meanders eastwards towards Marsham. The name 'Warren' suggests that rabbits were once farmed here and a Sheepwalk Plantation south of these lakes indicates sheep also featured. Mermaid's Head is where another spring rises next to the stream but it had to travel another couple of miles before there was sufficient flow to power a mill at Bolwick Hall (Rodgate) on the east of the A140.

Beyond Frogs Hall Spa Lane turns into a track until it is level with Stonegate before reverting to a classified road for another mile to Spa Farm due south of Aylsham where the Redwings Sanctuary is now sited. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Aylsham was well known for the chalybeate spring here which was considered a good cure for asthma. There was a practice of "Tinging with Gall" which involved adding ground up oak galls and/or leaves to make an ink or tincture that was added to the samples. However the flow was meagre and smaller even than the spring at Oulton Hall which allegedly was the largest in the county. Some brave souls who sampled the water in Edwardian times variously described the taste as "vitriolick" and "ferruginous" as well as "purgative" so that they "were disinclined to walk far the next day!". Accordingly the spa became disused over the twentieth century, and both this and the one at Oulton have been filled in. Gilbert White, whose butcher's shop is still in Red Lion Street, wrote of how Aylsham struggled as a market town over this period: "we.....did not realise how the well-being of the town was so dependent on the farming industry. The middle 20s saw the coming of the tractors; less horses wanted, less harnesses; men being laid off the farms. It was normal for farmers to settle their accounts after harvest, but not now. Many of them not able to pay were selling up or going broke. It was at this time that many farmers came to the area from Scotland (times were harder up there - as if that was possible). Some of them, no doubt, were backed by their Bank of Scotland which had faith in their fellow countrymen. Many people were on Parish Relief. It was a common sight to see tramps and people picking up fag ends out of the gutter. Families went into the workhouse; these were very hard times." Gilbert himself left the town as a young man in 1932 and did not return until 1951 with his wife and family. Perhaps the fact that Gilbert's Act of 1783 had given minor relief to parishes made him feel personally involved in that places like Buxton and Oulton no longer had to provide their own workhouse and this led to the Aylsham Union one being built on a larger and grander scale which reminds me of a minor public school and life was probably almost as bad. He finishes by echoing the sentiment expressed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in reference to the German threat in the First World War and voiced by Basil Rathbone in a Sherlock Holmes film in the Second World War:- "I well remember February 1939; a strong wind from the east bringing bitter cold and further rumours of impending war." The sentiment should perhaps not be lost on us 85 years later.



Aylsham Union Workhouse c. 1910

For the visit to the Hiam Estate at Brandon we enjoyed marvellous weather and it proved worthwhile with the driver free field operations the highlight. The self-propelled Robotti vehicles were on display and the biggest problem seemed to be for the operator to have the nerve to leave them to their own devices - even during the night. These Danish machines cost over £100,000 each but Jamie Lockhart and his colleagues have great confidence in them. With serious difficulty in getting sufficient labour for handling the huge amount of mainly parsnips and carrots that they process mechanisation is seen very much as the key there too. We were given a welcome barbeque and hope we can give at least £200 to YANA as their chosen charity since our hosts didn't want to be paid. Well done to **President Richard, Chairman Martin and John Cragg** for organising this. Apologies are due to **Rob Hughes** and the officers at Holt Rugby Club for taking it for granted that we could use their Bridge Road car park as our pick up point. Finally John Cragg and **Bill Poortvliet** 01263 761342 will again be pestering you for your malting barley samples over coming weeks and please ring John on with any queries or email him at j.cragg540@btinternet.com 01263 734652 . Kind **Chris Borrett** will again co-ordinate things and Rebecca Gee of Crisp Malt is lined up as our judge. Incidentally it was good to see Rebecca's predecessor Bob King being presented with his Duke of Edinburgh award by Prince Edward at the Norfolk Show and he has also won an innovation award from the Aylsham Show committee.

Hon. Secretary: **Tim Nicholson** 6 Great Yard The Street Saxthorpe Norwich NR11 7AH 07464 991741
tim_nicholson@ymail.com

Hon. Treasurer: **Laurie Hill** Summerhill House 1 Sculthorpe Road Fakenham NR21 9HA 07811 034215
laurie.hill@larking-gowen.co.uk