

AGM and Barley Competition

Third time lucky for Club's double barley champion.

For only the third time in seven decades a North Norfolk farmer completed the double in a malting barley championship.

The supreme award in Holt & District Farmers' Club's annual competition was won by Andrew Ross, of Cannister Hall Farm, Houghton St Giles, with a sample of Laureate spring barley.

Rebecca Gee, grain procurement director of the Great Ryburgh-based Crisp Malting Group, judged the 66 samples – just two short of the record number of entries in 2009. Ironically, in that very year, Mr Ross won the title with a sample of Tipple.

It was one of the most challenging years for winter-sown malting barley, said Ms Gee, who had judged the 34 samples and the 32 entries for the spring barley trophy. Chris Borrett, of grain merchants Adams & Howling, thanked John Cragg, the club's president Richard Brooks and Bill van Poortvliet, for collecting the samples.



Barley judge Rebecca Gee, left, grain procurement director.
Andrew Ross, spring, winter malting barley champion and Supreme champion.
Chris Borrett, right, of Adams & Howling with the winter barley trophy, the Sir Charles Mott Radclyffe trophy.

Mr Ross, who is a board member of NFU Sugar but will be standing down after 11 years in March 2025, had drilled his winning barley crop in late September. A combination of above-average rainfall in the following six months had proved especially challenging but to his delight, his spring variety, Laureate had produced a superb sample thanks to timely sunshine in late June and July. "I started drilling the field on March 20 but had to go very slowly because the ground was so wet and it took several days," he added. This sample will be judged against Stalham Farmers' Club's top barley for supreme inter-club honours.

He wonders whether his investment in a new combine played a part in producing cleaner, sharper samples. Mr Ross bought a Claas Trion 750 with 30ft header for the latest harvest. His combine driver,

John Woor, who joined him about four and a half years ago, has certainly found the new Claas a more comfortable and easy-to-drive machine. A valuable feature was the automatic self-adjustment mechanism.

Mr Ross, who is the club's vice chairman, joins a select band of clean sweep winners. The first to achieve the double was Melton Harrold, of GW Harrold, in 2016 with the spring variety, Husky, and the winter Maris Otter. Interestingly, in that year the top three winter samples were all Otter, which was originally launched in 1965. Mr Harrold's supreme sample was grown at Church Farm, Heacham – incidentally the same farm, which had produced the UK malting barley in 1989.

The following year, 2017, William Mack, of Hempstead Hall, triumphed with the spring variety, Propino and Venture in the winter section. The runner-up with Venture, was entered by Fowell Brothers, of Itteringham. And for those with a good memory at that October meeting, the former malting barley judge, Bob King, forecast a bright future for a new variety - Laureate with a significant yield advantage over Concerto and quality for both brewers and distillers.

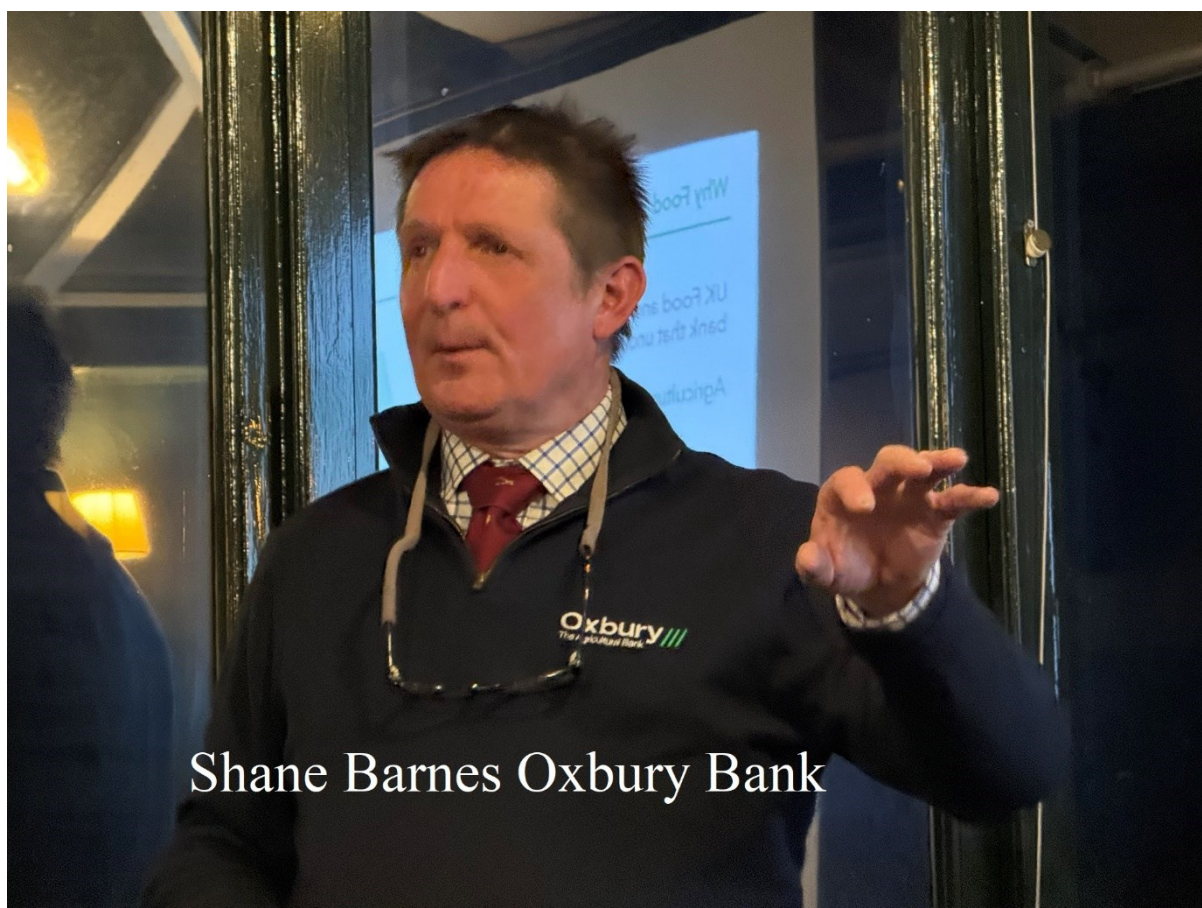
At the latest meeting, Martin Jensen, chairman, welcomed about 40 members to the club's 74th annual meeting. He was pleased that the club, founded in 1948, had been able to return to its spiritual home at the Feathers, Holt, after four years at the town's rugby club. It was agreed to write thanking Holt Rugby Football Club and officials including Rob Hughes for providing a temporary home for four seasons when the club had to find an alternative meeting place.



Further, Mr Jensen emphasised that all members would be welcome to join the committee for supper before meetings. He was sure that the staff at the Feathers would be pleased to welcome those having supper beforehand.

The treasurer Laurie Hill reported on the club's finances, which had included holding the 75th anniversary dinner and visits to Frederick Hiam at Brandon and the trip to Sweden. Subscription income was £2,215 against £2,375 in the previous year. Donations by the club in the year to July 31 of £1,235 had been made to Holt Youth Project and mental health awareness charity YANA. After some debate, it was agreed to increase the annual subscription to £30 from £20, which would include a family membership.

Mid-Norfolk farmer Neville Stangroom highlighted the opportunity to apply for a Nuffield study award, which has been supported by the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association since 1984. Sadly, it had not been possible to make a Norfolk award this year. The RNAA, which funded £8,500 towards a Nuffield award, would like to encourage applicants. There have been at least seven years when no Norfolk applicant was successful but Mr Stangroom, who had won a Nuffield in 1979 and spent two months in Australia, said that it was a wonderful opportunity. Details are online through the Nuffield website. Finally, a presentation on the Oxbury Bank, a specialist in funding for agriculture, was made by a former Barclays Bank veteran of some 30 years' standing, Shane Barnes. It had carved out a 4pc market share from a standing start in February 2021, said the bank's senior development manager.



Shane Barnes Oxbury Bank

The vote of thanks was given by Peter Perry-Warnes, who also thanked all the club's officers and especially the hard-working secretary Tim Nicholson. In closing, he emphasised the need for the club to recruit new members. He was concerned when he looked at the audience of 40 or so members suggesting that the average age of those present was probably around 70.

The meeting concluded at 9.35pm. The next meeting would be on Tuesday, November 12 when Rebecca Mayhew would be speaking about the family's south Norfolk dairy enterprise.

Malting barley competition

Results – Supreme and reserve championship: Andrew Ross, of Houghton St Giles, with Laureate, and Flagon winter barley.

The Charles Mott-Radclyffe Cup (winter varieties) – 1 Mr A Ross; 2 Martin Fisher, Craft; 3 William Mack, Hempstead, Craft.

The Hammond Trophy (spring) – 1 Mr A Ross, Laureate; 2 Mr W Mack, Diablo, 3 Stuart Ross, Laureate.

Micheal Pollitt