

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

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www.holtfarmers.club

CLUB MATTERS

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I trust that you each avoided the £100 penalty for not submitting your tax return by 31st January as *Larking Gowen's Farm & Rural Business team* and other accountants battled on your behalf. Since Labour's Autumn Budget they have also had the IHT changes to consider which are due to take effect from 6th April, 2026. Accordingly **Laurie Hill** delayed giving us his take on this topic du jour until he had a bit more time available and he has recruited his fellow partner *Sally Farrow on the firm's Private Clients, Trusts & Probate team* to join him on *Tuesday* for their *Autumn 2024 Budget Update and IHT Implications, 7.30 at The Feathers*. This is a busy time of year for conferences with the Norfolk Farming one earlier on 11th February and the Worshipful Company of Farmers' City Food & Drink Lecture at London's Guildhall on 11th March. Nevertheless we have been able to secure *Nuffield Scholar Peter Craven* for our subsequent meeting to answer *How do you take a family farming business from Good to Great, and what is the formula for farming success?* He hopes to introduce himself on Tuesday and can perhaps give us some clarification on his *March talk, again 7.30 at The Feathers on Tuesday 11th*. Meanwhile places are still being found for late bookers for the *Leicestershire Trip from 4th to 6th June* but this should be 'make your mind up time' to come on 'William's Wagon' by Tuesday's meeting. **William Youngs** may also have some more details for the *Visit to Bayfield Hall & Park on 1st July*.



Norfolk has had strong connections with *Leicestershire* down the centuries. John Howard, also known by Shakespeare as 'Jack of Norfolk', was a Yorkist in the Plantagenet period and a Norfolk MP. He fought for Edward IV who knighted him after his victory at the Battle of Towton (1461), the bloodiest ever encounter on British soil, and subsequently made him Treasurer of the Royal Household. He also found favour under Richard III who made him Earl Marshal of all England, Lord High Admiral of all England and Ireland (not forgetting Aquitaine) and then First Duke of Norfolk (3rd creation). In Bosworth Field (1485) the Lancastrian Sir John Savage is said to have slain him in single combat not long before Richard III met his ignominious and unseated end. Our Jack was buried at Thetford Priory while the body of his rightful King was hacked at while slung across a horse and taken to Leicester where it was displayed for two days. Richard III was the last English king to die in battle but had no known grave. Shakespeare's take on him was coloured by the fact that he had Tudor patrons while stories abounded about Richard's bones being thrown into the River Soar that runs through Leicester. The uncertainty persisted for over half a millennium up to the extraordinary moment in 2012 when royal bones were discovered in a shallow grave under a Leicester car park. The red letter day was 25th August which was the anniversary of the time the truly hunchbacked body was believed to have been buried in the Greyfriars church. An 'R' had been randomly painted on the ground and on the very first scoop the excavator hit and slightly damaged bone below that precise spot. Many of you will have followed the almost unbelievable story on Channel 4 and elsewhere. There is now a museum there where one can view the site of the car park and Richard III's bones have been reburied in Leicester Cathedral after claims from York Minster and Westminster Abbey were rejected.

The Howard family was soon able to return to royal favour under the Tudors while Robert Dudley, Queen Elizabeth favourite (i.e. probable lover), was also ennobled as Earl of Leicester in 1564. He didn't have any heirs but Sir Edward Coke (pronounced 'Cook') was Lord Chief Justice early in the Stuart period and it was his great-great-great-grandson Thomas who was one of Norfolk's two MPs in the 1720s. He commissioned Holkham Hall but was another who was badly affected by losses in the South Sea Bubble so that the Palladian palace wasn't finished when he died in 1759. His son predeceased him so a nephew inherited and took the Coke name before begetting Thomas who became 1st Earl of Leicester (7th creation) M.P. and the agricultural reformer known as 'Coke of Norfolk' with the inheritance of 30,000 acres. How much credit he deserves for prompting the Agricultural Revolution is uncertain but, along with his neighbour 'Turnip Townshend', he is still seen as a "real hero of Norfolk agriculture". He pioneered the use of lucerne and cocksfoot while preferring Scottish 'neeps' to watery Norfolk turnips. Sheep were his main thing and 'Coke's Sheep Shearings' became famous gatherings. Appropriately he promoted the English Leicester as a fast-maturing cross onto the Norfolk Horn which was still the dominant breed in East Anglia. This advanced the work of Robert Bakewell from near Loughborough in Leicestershire who was already implementing selective breeding in both sheep and cattle as well as working horses. Starting with breeds such as the Lincoln Longwool he systematically bred fine-boned but larger sheep that were polled (hornless) and more suited for meat production while still providing lustrous wool. There were questions over inbreeding, fecundity and the quality of the meat but his effect on farming, at home and abroad, was transformative. Bakewell is perhaps most famous for his cattle breeding and, while his favoured Longhorns later fell out of fashion, the Border Leicester sheep remains the most successful cross for breeding ewes (mules).



From cattle we get cheese and the renowned Red Leicester. It was originally made on Leicestershire farms as an alternative to Stilton and coloured with carrot or beetroot juice to distinguish it from White Leicester which was an uncoloured cheddar-type cheese. Although the village of Stilton is in Cambridgeshire it is Leicestershire and one or two neighbouring areas that has been the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) for this rotting foodstuff. In 1724 Daniel Defoe described Stilton cheese as "our English Parmesan" which "is brought to table with mites or maggots round it, so thick that they bring a spoon with them for you to eat the mites with, as you do with the cheese". Stilton village was a coaching stop on the Great North Road and bread and cheese became so popular with travellers that supplies had to be imported from the dairy farming areas 40 miles to the west while Cambridgeshire was better suited to arable farming. The whey from cheesemaking was then fed to pigs which eventually enabled Melton Mowbray to become another PDO for its pork pies. The well named Frances Paulett was the cheesemaker from nearby Wymondham who helped establish the recipe and production techniques 300 years ago and traditional pie making is also strictly monitored. Melton Mowbray is sometimes claimed to be the source of the term 'paint the town red'. Allegedly in 1837 'The Mad Marquess' of Waterford and his aristocratic friends, having spent a day at the races, were refused entry at the toll house for being drunk and disorderly. They proceeded to a couple of in the Market Place where they created mayhem and covered everything in their way with red paint including the town watchman.

Oddly enough Leicester City now play in an all blue football strip. Here was a story comparable with The King in the Car Park when, in 2016, The Foxes won the Premier League against odds of 5000 to 1 at the start of the season. It was a romantic and momentous feat even though Claudio Ranieri, the manager, was sacked less than ten months later and the club was relegated in 2023. Leicester City's nickname is thought to derive from the county's long association with foxhunting and was perhaps prompted by the original 1884 team being Leicester Fosse. Our king hunted with The Quorn in the 1980s and the history of the sport there dates back to the 17th century. Leicestershire County Cricket Club also feature a fox as their emblem and they have a proud history even if in recent years they have fallen from grace somewhat at Grace Road. David Gower was the most graceful England batsman of my generation and has been voted the Club's greatest ever player although it required the recruitment of Yorkshire's Ray Illingworth to captain them to their greatest successes in the 1970s. Tykes Bird (Dickie), Birkenshaw and Balderstone also played for them along with Ken Higgs (a great demo- lisher of teas) and Jonathan Agnew. The Norfolk connection was via Will Jefferson who was the tallest English batsman ever and whose father Richard captained Norfolk and once nearly knocked Gary Sobers' block off.



However it is rugby union where the connections are strongest with **Nick, Tom & Ben Youngs** being Leicester Tigers legends as well as international stars. I am sure that most rugby followers in Norfolk, and certainly those in the north-east of the county, support the Tigers on account of the strong links forged at Holt, Gresham's and North Walsham over many decades. With Jack van Poortvliet vying for the England No. 9 jersey and Ben becoming Head of Performance Sport at Gresham's there is every likelihood that this connection will continue. Leicester, the most landlocked county in England, is little more than 100 miles from Holt which takes about 2 hours 30 minutes by car. Historically Leicester folk have headed to the Norfolk and Lincolnshire coasts for their holidays and retirement; in the 1980s they were still selling The Leicester Mercury for the holidaymakers in Blakeney. I attach the itinerary again in case anyone is left who wishes to make the journey in the opposite direction between **4th and 6th June**.

Tim

P.S. Poor Mads Nipper, our Danish friend, is stepping down as Orsted Chief Executive with their American operations having caused their share price to crash. Trump telling the USA to "Drill Baby Drill" seems unlikely to help. Mads blames fundamental changes in the renewable energy market especially the offshore wind industry - in which Orsted had being investing heavily along the Eastern Seaboard. It will be interesting to see what the ramifications might be on this side of the pond.

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