

# 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

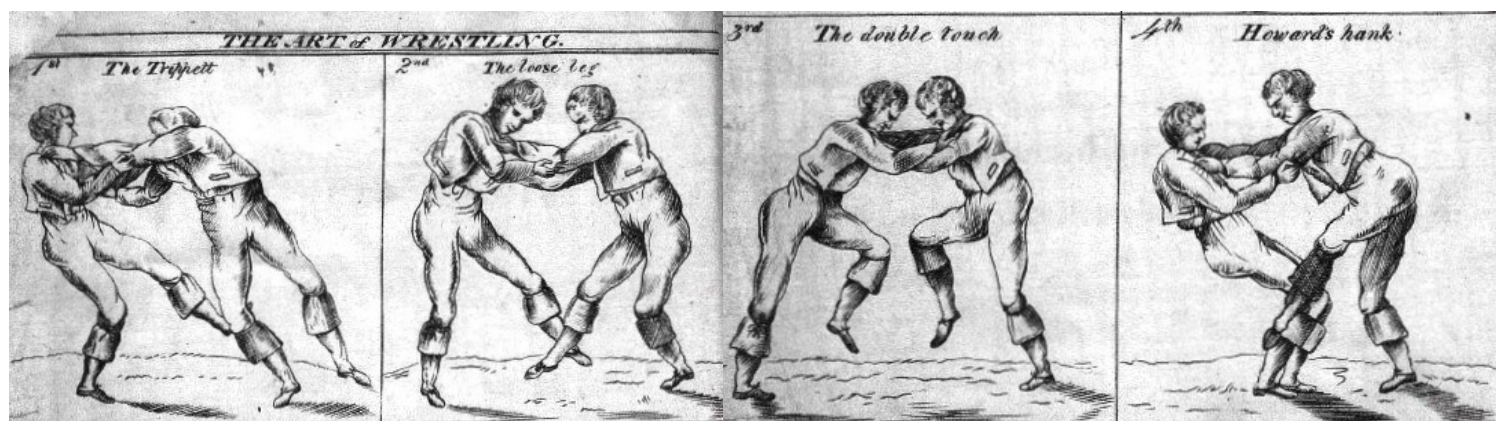
### May 2025

After staging a remarkable revival in recent seasons it is sad to hear that Aldborough Cricket Club appears to have imploded due to off field matters. Two centuries ago there was questionable sporting behaviour just up the road at Bessingham in the form of a Norfolk Wrestling Match at the Three Horseshoes pub. **Richard Youngs**, surprisingly light on his feet like many a big man, has mentioned how teams from the Hare & Hounds at Hempstead and the Red Hart at Bodham would compete in these shin kicking contests. They were an early version of judo with rules laid down for landlords by Charles Layton of Ber Street who was curiously named The Celebrated Game Chicken. There was widespread skulduggery with metal toe caps and straw stuffed down the legs of trousers to form a rudimentary shin pad. The Bessingham publican in 1816 was Mr. J. Warner who offered a prize by subscription and required the 24 men 'to play with fair shoes'. By 1850, after a series of fatalities, the sport was banned in most counties and so it has remained despite the doughty efforts of players like Chopper Harris and Norman Hunter to revive it in the 1970s. Sensibly Mr. Warner stipulated that 'no prizes would be given after sunset' since, presumably, by then the wrestlers would be 'legless'. The Fell family have a long connection here since Col. Austin Fell bought the Three Horseshoes in 1961 after it had closed and when the Spurrells' Estate was being dispersed. His son Tony, antique dealer and former Aldborough cricket captain, lives there now and coincidentally renamed it 'The Shoes' although the pair he has petrified in front don't appear wholly 'fair' to me. One of the Norfolk rules barred any holding below the thucklebone (sounds painful) and there was no grappling on the ground. This was different in other parts of the country like Devon where there was 'hugging' and Abraham Chadd was champion. He defeated the Cornish champion Jas. Polkinghorne while Isaac Nicholson of Thirsk was champion in the north where Cumberland & Westmorland Wrestling has survived. There was a saying "tis a poor cock that can neither crow nor tread" meaning this was not a sport 'for the faint of heart or soft of bone'.



Bessingham Horse "shoes"

The 'collars and elbows men of Bessingham' kicked off on Tuesday 24th June which would have been the slack time before harvest. However 1816 is sometimes referred to as 'The Year without a Summer' on account of the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia the previous year. This is reckoned to have been four times as powerful as the Krakatoa eruption in 1883 added to which there was probably another, even stronger, eruption in an unspecified polar region. These led to widespread crop failure which the Farmers' Magazine described as "uncommonly unpropitious". Professor Hubert Lamb, Norman's father, referred to this as part of 'the little ice age' as there had been a run of poor harvests during the Napoleonic Wars. The 1815 one had been a rare success but demobilisation after the victory at Waterloo brought further pressure on the populace where there was already unemployment and hunger. The Church and landlords were not as sympathetic as they should have been and this led up to Luddites breaking threshing machines and the alleged appearance of Captain Swing in these and other parts of the kingdom. May and the weeks after Whitsun was traditionally the time for these brutal sports to be played. Another two hundred years before in the reigns of King Charles I and II it was a Norfolk born lawyer Robert Dover who revived them in his Cotswold Olimpicks and intermittently these have continued to this very day. On Friday at Dover's Hill between Weston Subedge and Chipping Campden there will be shin kicking where sticklers will ensure that contestants don't put gall on their shoes to make the wounds more painful and faggotting (bribery and betting) will be prohibited. At the opposite end of Gloucestershire they have just held the madcap annual cheese rolling contest precipitately chasing a 3kg. wheel of Double Gloucester down the precipitous Cooper's Hill at Brockworth near Gloucester. We may be fortunate that Norfolk is so flat that injuries, sometimes fatal, are not sustained chasing a Binham Blue in like manner.



They say that rugby is a thugs' game played by gentlemen and soccer is a gentlemen's game played by thugs. Apparently for a while there has been a so called sport in Australia and New Zealand called 'running it straight' which echoes the aforementioned shin kicking contests. Two 'units', one holding a ball, simply run full tilt into a head on collision or 'hit' in rugby parlance. This has gone viral on social media although a Kiwi teenager died in competing only this week so things may have to change. **William Youngs**, with the help of his nephew Ben, has organised things nicely for us in ensuring that Leicester Tigers will be at Welford Road for our imminent visit. Despite a heavy defeat by Challenge Cup winners Bath last time out, Leicester should secure a home tie by beating Newcastle on Saturday in the final full round of Gallagher Premiership matches. The semi- final play offs are then on the following weekend with the final at Twickenham on 14th June. While hopes may be dashed the ante has been upped by Ben's fellow podcaster Dan Cole realisation that, with 118 international caps, he is not now going to overtake Ben's record 127. He will therefore be retiring at the end of the season along with Ben and the Tigers' former England full back Mike Brown. Finally, to give everyone a mention, there was a clip of Warren Gatland being asked what was one moment he particularly remembers from his time as Lions manager and he cited the reaction **Tom Youngs** gave him to being dropped. Need I say more?

*Tim*

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