

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Richard Brooks

Chairman: Martin Jensen

Vice-Chairman: Andrew Ross

www.holtfarmers.club

CLUB MATTERS

Christmas 2024

Ben is Back. Long after his first appearance we are glad to hear again from **Ben Turner Senior, Managing Director of Ben Burgess**. This follows a theme with Ben Youngs returning to Gresham's as Head of Performance Sport and Ben Stokes recovering from injury and a drubbing by Pakistan to put the Kiwis in their place this month. Ben Turner has also named his son Ben who is a chip off the old block as a Director of Ben Burgess as well as the new President of our friends the Clan Trust. I'm pleased to report a good number of deposits being lodged for the **Trip to Leics. & Lincs. from 4th to 6th June** and it will help **William Youngs** if members can commit by the time of **Ben Turner's Talk on Tuesday, 14th January**. It is £260 for a twin room and £330 for a single made payable to Holt & District Farmers' Club sort code 20-03-06, account number 10554197. **Sally Farrow** is our **Treasurer Laurie's** fellow partner at **Larking Gowen on 11th February** with Nuffield Scholar **Peter Craven** along on **11th March**. Our visit to **Roger Combe's Bayfield Estate on 1st July** will complete our summer season and William will also provide further details for this in due course. We feel we are gradually getting our return to The Feathers sorted and thanks for your patience; a soundproof screen or curtain is on our Christmas wish list.



'Mr. Gray' - "very much a loner" ?

We had a good turnout for Dr Caston with the likes of **Tony Williams, Neville Stangroom** and **Peter Lilwall** in attendance again along with **Will Wilson**, a new member from the Dereham area whose company erect silos. Will is relatively young and keen to get involved with the club; the fact that his email address is will@understandingagriculture.com promises much. An interesting talk was enlivened by a pertinent question from **Michael Pollitt** - things often become animated when GM foods or bitcoin are being discussed - Michael's full report is attached and we are always grateful to him for this and everything else he does. It was also good to see **Stuart Ross** on the mend and he is now Deputy Chairman of the Holt Youth Project with which we were so impressed last year. Again at Michael's prompting, it was agreed that the Club would donate £500 which the clever man agreed to pay in his personal capacity in order to attract Gift Aid. Laurie reimbursed him and the attached thank you letter is from the Thurning vet Tom Hume who is now Chairman and who, along with Julie Alford as the key person in the Project, so impressed us in his talk about this and his cross channel swim. It has been encouraging to see the Great and the Good joining the

EDP's Fair Deal for Farmers campaign with the Bishop of Norwich, Lord Leicester (Tom Coke) and Baroness Shephard (Gill from Knapton) in the House of Lords. In the lower house local laird Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown has been pressing the case now that he chairs the Public Accounts Select Committee. His majority in July was only one sixth of the £20,000 + he gained in 2019 although there may have been changes to his Cotswolds constituency where Jeremy Clarkson farms. We are pleased that his son **Edward** has joined us as a member while he runs the Gresham Hall Estate. Another recently joined member is **James Watchorn** who has moved to become a partner at Cruso & Wilkin where he has also been opining on how farmers need to adapt to survive in these uncertain times.

Perhaps Holt, which often features strongly in newspapers and magazines as one of the best small towns in the UK in various ways, is finally waking up. In 1894 Vera Berlyn, a rather flowery travel writer, published *'Sun-Rise: Rambles in Eastern England'* with a chapter on the newly popular Poppyland area *'Round Cromer'*. For the most part she waxes lyrical about the coast and countryside while relating some of the local history that I have been covering. However when she reaches this town she observes *that "the smugness and stiffness of Holt and its air of dull country-town propriety, creates a longing to be on the road again."* That's us told; we might not have impressed Vera in the twentieth century either. There have been rumours of how the Krays occasionally hid out in places like Wells and Holt when things got too hot for them in Essex and their East End haunts. As a cricket mad adolescent in Yorkshire it was George Davis, an either famous or infamous associate of the Krays, who first alerted me to Gangland 'goings on'. It was the last day of the 1975 Ashes test at Headingley with the game and series finely balanced. Tony Greig and Ian Chappell were the captains while also featuring were Lillee and Thomson, Phil Edmonds with 5 for 25 on debut plus David Steele with two good scores *en route* to becoming the unlikeliest ever BBC Sports Personality of the Year and earning a mountain of chops and steaks from a Northampton butcher for his benefit season.



A free George Davis appears "well fed and not short of money"

The frustration when campaigners for Mr Davis's release from prison dug up the pitch overnight and poured oil on it was immense and nationwide. The fact that steady rain would have prevented play in any case did not lessen my resentment even when I was sat in a Holt barber's chair a quarter of a century later. This was when I learnt that my coiffeur is the nephew of said Mr Davis who had been released less than a year after Headingley - the sabotage had worked. Notwithstanding by 1978 'Innocent' George had been banged up for a remarkably similar payroll robbery to the one he had been convicted of initially and then again for stealing, of all things, mailbags. He is still alive aged 83 and, according to a Guardian journalist who happens to be married to Julie Christie, he appears *"well fed and not short of money"*. Coincidentally around that same time I was getting my hair cut a Mr Gray rocked up in his chauffeur driven, stretch limo that he used as a mobile office. He said he was looking for property investments and bought the flat above the barber's shop. For recreation he tried to join Sheringham Golf Club but was told that there was a long waiting list; his response was to ask if the Club was for sale and he had in fact bought Elstree Golf Club a few years earlier. Mr Gray (not his real name) was *"a loner who ran a one man operation"* and things did not turn out for him as well as they did for George Davis. In 1993 he was walking down Marylebone High Street with his Thai girlfriend when a hitman drove up on a motorcycle and shot him three times in the head. It transpired Mr Gray was a known associate of Kenneth Noye who in 1983 organised the biggest bullion heist in the UK at that time (until Chancellor Gordon Brown) by stealing £26 million worth from the Brinks-Mat warehouse at Heathrow. Sidney Winks (great name terrible guy), a policeman-turned- gundealer, was

also one of Noye's contacts and he supplied the aforementioned motorcycle so it seems likely that Noye ordered the hit. You may recall that Noye fled to Gibraltar and eventually got sentenced for killing someone in a road rage incident. For this and the robbery he served a total of twenty years in prison and, aged 77, he is currently 'at large'. Mr Gray's flat has stood unoccupied for many years and my barber is now taking down his pole. With these connections and both a butcher's and a deli across the street I never dared ask him for a shave.

Tim

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