

# **HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB**

**FOUNDED 1948**

*President:* Peter Perry-Warnes

*Chairman:* Martin Jensen

*Vice-Chairman:* Andrew Ross

[www.holtfarmers.club](http://www.holtfarmers.club)

## **CLUB MATTERS November 2025**

### **Mark Harrison R.I.P. 1943 – 2025**

You must be aware by now that Stiffkey is one of my happy stomping grounds primarily on account of the extraordinary coincidence that, within forty years in the first half of last century, this tiny coastal village harboured two of the most infamous characters in modern English history. Firstly there was the Reverend Cattel prodger Harold Davidson followed by the five furrow fascist Henry Williamson. Each can, in their own individualistic ways, be viewed as victims and in spite of their undeniable faults I sympathise to some extent. Williamson was only half way through his eight years at Old Hall Farm when his book *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* was published in 1941 and this poignant illustration is from that tome.



Tarka the Rotter berated himself for, literally, flogging a dead horse as he prioritised getting the farm tracks into good condition above getting the land into good heart. He sold up in 1945 to return to Devon and it was only seven years later that Guy Harrison from Warham acquired Old Hall Farm. It would have been a surprise, and probably an excitement, for his ten year old son when the North Sea Flood breached the sea bank at White Bridges between Stiffkey and Morston on 31st January, 1953. Sadly this **Mark Harrison**, a long time member of our club, died last month. He was a quietly committed farmer who was kind enough to host our Farm Walk in 2000 and whose career is outlined in this extract from Stiffkey with Cockthorpe which is an excellent, illustrated publication by Stiffkey Local History Group in 2013. It is written by the late Rev. Tony Hodgson who had been a curate at Stiffkey in the 1960s and co-founded the Rural Theology Association.

By the 1970s the viability of almost all small farmers in the country had come under such pressure, partly because the subsidies were generally paid by the acre which meant that the majority went to the larger, better-off farmers, that a very high proportion of the smaller farmers abandoned farming altogether; this too happened in Stiffkey where the majority of the farming is carried out by just one family, the Harrisons. The Harrison family started farming in Stiffkey in 1952 with the purchase of Vale Farm. In the present decade they own 1,160 acres in the villages of Stiffkey and Morston, and farm a further 800 acres in the local area. Much of the acreage farmed is arable, including wheat, oilseed rape, sugar, beet, potatoes and barley. The barley is sold for malting and the potatoes are sold for processing for Walkers and Kettle Crisps among others. The grass acreage is grazed by a 40-cow suckler herd of Simmental and Charolais crosses. The beef products are sold exclusively to the local butcher, Arthur Howell in Wells. Much of the woodland has been felled and replanted, and also several new plantations have been created using Corsican pine, beech, oak, chestnut and other species. Productivity has been increased by efficient drainage systems, but conservation

There is a public footpath past the buildings where Williamson farmed featuring a swastika and other inscriptions. This forms part of one my favourite walks across Home and Hall Hills, respectively opposite the Red Lion and the Old Hall, before crossing the river en route for the combe called Cockthorpe Common. Mark was involved with the old wartime camp against the marshes where the officers' mess has been turned into The Rescue Wooden Boats Maritime Heritage Centre as well as the River Stiffkey Catchment Plan while being a parish councillor and filling other roles. The farming at Vale Farm remains in the good hands of his sons Phil and Matthew, ably assisted by their secretary for 32 years, Suzanne Coke (nee Long). A Service of Celebration is to be held at Binham Priory on Monday, 17th November at 2 p.m. and afterwards to The Parlour which is the adjacent café run by Will and Alex Wales alongside their dairy operation at Abbey Farm - you should be able to buy raw milk direct from their vending machine.



Cattle on the \_ water meadows : Meanwhile the worm may, finally have turned. The new Local Plan for North Norfolk over the next 15 years is due to be adopted before the end of this year after the latest submission was deemed 'sound', subject to the incorporation of a number of main modifications. Since 2016 under the 'emerging' plans for Holt a 2.3 acre field south of the Listed Methodist Church off the Norwich Road was deemed capable of accommodating

up to 27 dwellings. An application for 24 was submitted late last year with 4 of them being affordable apartments but, with around 60 objections, the overall number has been reduced to 23. This has just obtained approval in principle from the Conservation & Design team at Cromer but a retired Professor of Conservation Ecology may have thrown a spanner in the works. In the late 1980s it was the Great Crested Newt that was the key piece in the NIMBYs' armoury against major development proposals such as the A149 Snettisham-Ingoldisthorpe-Dersingham bypass scheme. This reptile was still being championed in 2020 in respect of the A149 North Walsham Western Link Road feasibility study. The professor, self-described as an insect ecologist and phylogeographer, is aware that Slow Worms found in the Holt field and nearby are also protected under Section 9 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 so are these common, legless lizards to become the 21st century 'players' and assume the special status of their four-legged cousins the newts?



I don't know how much **Tim Papworth** knows about such things but he has more than enough to talk to us about including how smoking can have significant health benefits. His talk is at **7.30 on Tuesday** when there will be a rare absence from our **Chairman** who will be at The Agritechnica Show in Hanover. Fear not though as **Andrew Ross**, no doubt still smiling like traitor Alan Carr, will be in the chair accompanied by **Peter Perry-Warnes** on his Presidential debut. To confirm, we next have **Janet Sorley on Tuesday, 9th December** who is Murphy's Project Director in respect of the **Norfolk Offshore Wind Zone** to round the year off.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim' with a stylized flourish above it.

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