

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

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CLUB MATTERS

DECEMBER 2025

The long running saga over the North Norfolk Glamping site near the river Glaven between Holt and Edgefield took another turn last month. Nigel Marsh, the site operator who is facing a court case next year having been accused of stealing the neighbouring bird scarers, lost his appeal against a 2023 Enforcement Notice requiring him to remove his shepherds' huts. NNDC have never been keen on these and were worried about their impact in the heart of the Glaven Valley Conservation Area. The Bishop of Norwich is currently fighting in the House of Lords to gain extra protection for chalk streams like the Glaven. According to the EDP there are only about 200 such streams worldwide 85% of which are in the UK and about 25 (15%) of these flow through Norfolk. The woodland surrounding these shepherds' huts is called Dam Hill Plantation but that name was given before Jack Rawlings created three ponds here in the middle of the last century. They lie within a furlong of the Glaven which was straightened in the eighteenth century when it was called Hempstead Beck. I can find no evidence of it being dammed although there was a Wade Mill at Smokers Hole a short distance upstream. A tithe map from around 1840 shows a stream running past the wood and through where the series of three ponds now are, coming from the direction of Valley Farm where Ian & Lorna Ross lived but stopping short of the Glaven. Was the eponymous 'dam' just an embankment to create a boggy area suitable for shooting shrike and the like but not amounting to a proper pond? I have another question: Where was the Edgefield meadow where poor little Dorothy Horne befell a rare accident? In 1934 she was just three years old and living at Mill Street in Holt when her grandfather took her to pick cowslips. Sadly she became one of the very rare fatal victims of an adder bite above her ankle and died at Cromer less than 24 hours later.



Jack Rawlings was a naturalist who established Kelling Aviaries at Holgate Hill half way between Holt and Weybourne en route to Kelling Heath. He imported Blue headed Lorikeets and Ijima's Copper Pheasants from Japan while adding reptile and monkey houses as well as tea rooms to create a well known visitor attraction in the 1960s and '70s. The enterprise seemed rather forlorn by the time I visited around 1990 when the only animals on display were a sorry pair of golden eagles being fed on a constant supply of chicks newly hatched in an incubator. Gordon Hiscock, who ran Kelly's Birds petshop in Holt, had taken over the aviaries by then and Mike Crane ran his Emcy's Garden Centre alongside here for the next 27 years. It was the arrival

of Gary Widdowson, the recycling tycoon and showjumper, which transformed the situation. After he had acquired the Kelling Estate for £25 million in 2008 he subsequently also bought Emcys and the Kelling Park Hotel for £800,000. The former has been improved markedly to include a café, food hall and children's play area and is now known as Holt Garden Centre while the latter has now been demolished after permission was granted for it to be replaced by eight dwelling despite a long planning process when there was a refusal on appeal.

The Kelling Park Hotel also had a controversial history. Chancellor Care Homes used it to accommodate some very disturbed patients which caused consternation in the vicinity. This was the firm that subsequently acquired the former Cawston College where there were also reports of violent incidents. After his one term as Tory MP for North Norfolk David Prior became non-executive director and was arrested on account of alleged financial irregularities in 2006. Although he was eventually exonerated the company went into administration in 2009 and only this autumn a £30 million claim by the other directors against the Norfolk Chief Constable for malicious prosecution was dismissed. The psychiatric operation was taken over by the Jeasal Group but three deaths led to the hospital closing in 2021. Banham Poultry then applied to house around fifty eastern European butchers here for their Attleborough operation and this may have been granted since there is a current application for this temporary use to be extended for another two years. With plans to regenerate the site still unforthcoming this seems a rather sad outcome for Sir George Cawston's late Victorian manor house especially, I imagine, for the former college inmates old boys amongst our membership.



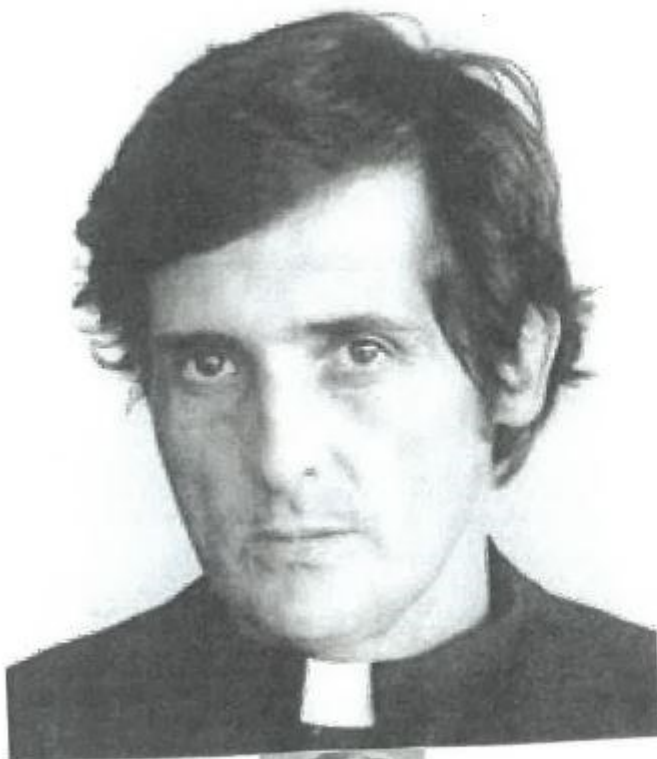
Kelling Park Hotel before and during demolition; site since cleared

Back at Kelling the 80 m wide strip for the Hornsea 3 cable has been reinstated for the most part. It runs parallel with Kelling Street before angling south-eastwards past Kelling Hall to cross the Poppy Line railway, pass through Forestry Commission woodland and then cross the A148 between High Kelling and Bodham into Ross and Cubitt country. It crosses the road to Weybourne just beyond Holt Garden Centre where a large area was sold off in one acre parcels a generation ago. These were snapped up by people who had the idea of living there - perhaps even on a permanent basis. In fact the planning rules did not allow this or even caravans but several were prepared to try it on. All kinds of mobile homes and sheds appeared along with horses so that the place soon looked like a shanty town amidst the ugly cavaletti of 'horsiculture'. I believe a camel once resided here unless that was another of the Kelling Park attractions. James and Chris Harrison had been farming the Estate and a poignant moment has recently been reached with the end of the Deterding family's involvement. This had started with Sir Henri Deterding purchasing the estate before the First World War and commissioning the young Sir Edward Maufe as architect to replace Kelling Hall as a shooting lodge. He was reputed to have taken the shooting rights over 18,000 acres and to have later become one of the richest men in the world as chairman of Royal Dutch Shell. In 1923 he had Blakeney Hotel built

in similar Arts and Crafts style although his reputation was tainted by his association with the Nazi regime. It was his grandson Jim who married the artist Shirley Carnt, still painting at Thornham, who sold the estate and Sarah is his sole surviving sibling. Her husband John Walker, a Yorkshire solicitor and a shooting man, died a few weeks ago and Sarah has had to move into a home in Holt so that the direct line of Deterdings 'have left the building'.

This brings me onto my Christmas book recommendations. There has been excellent nature writing from the prolific John Lewis-Stempel with books on the lark, the cuckoo, sheep, night walking and farming in France since my 2021 recommendation *Woodston: The Biography of an English Farm*. His latest is titled *England: A Natural History* while the Fakenham doctor's son Nick Acheson has written the unlikely but absorbing *The Meaning of Geese: A Thousand Miles in Search of Home* and East Anglian journalist Richard Negus produced *Words from the Hedge: A Hedgelayers View of the Countryside*. However my left field choice is *Sea-Change* by Cromer author Jessica Streeting with a foreword by local bad boy done good Stephen Fry. It is another poignant tale concerning Paul Farnham who was Rector of Cawston between 1975 and 1980 when his job included being Chaplain at Cawston College where he would have been responsible for the moral guidance of several of our members in their youth. Methinks he was almost as successful in that role as in his role as a sailing instructor which forms the book's climax. Short and in verse form, it certainly lingers in my memory.

Ascension Morning 1979 atop Cawston Church Tower. Revd. Paul Farnham – the subject of my Xmas book suggestion – with his daughters Jessica & Alice. Stephen Fry was recruited by him to teach the girls maths and the Boy from Booton likens their father's appearance to that of Jason Miller who appeared in *The Exorcist*, the iconic horror film from the 1970s.



Finally you will surely be sorely missed if you do not hear **Janet Sorley, Project Director for Murphy's** on the **Norfolk Offshore Wind Zone at The Feathers, 7.30 on Tuesday, 9th December.**



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