

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Peter Perry-Warnes

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www.holtfarmers.club

CLUB MATTERS

MARCH 2026

Last month I referred to the 'hollow way' at Matlask which is still sunken and known as Watery Lane as it leads south-eastwards to Lower Street where a few years ago there was a huge pet pig that was known to break into it's master's kitchen when hungry and a horse which could find it's way home from the Black Boys in Aldborough without being directed. Beyond lies the round towered Wickmere Church with many relics of the Walpoles since the neighbouring Wolterton Church, apart from the round tower which was kept as a decorative landmark, was obliterated along with the rest of the village to make way for Wolterton Hall in the 1730s.

Wolterton Church

By Richard Farrow

Through the trees I saw it stand,
An ancient tower in the land,
Bereft of roof and glass and door,
With weeds and brambles on the floor.

No voices echo in the nave,
No prayers are offered for the brave,
The silence of the centuries past,
Is all that lingers to the last.

Yet in the stones a story lies,
Of humble folk and noble ties,
Who gathered here in faith and fear,
Throughout the passing of the year.

The tower stands, a lonely guard,
Within the quiet churchyard,
A witness to the passage of time,
In Walterton's secluded clime.



This poem is by my late friend Richard Farrow who was known as "The Crab" at Aldborough for his adhesive batting style having grown up on his father Gilbert's farm at Oulton. Inside Wickmere Church is this photo from, I guess, the late '80s featuring a fresh faced **Jimmy Fowell**, our erstwhile President **Richard Brooks** and, also from Edgefield at that time, Charles Sands who was then our Vice Chairman.



They are presumably gathered to celebrate Plough Sunday; sadly Charles is no longer with us and Canon Maurice lasted even less time having been 'given the living' at Wickmere in order to save him from the stress at Blakeney. Obscured down a recently disputed lobe behind the Church is The Old Rectory - a rambling mid Victorian pile with good outbuildings and grounds. However it's shortcomings were vehemently described by Revd. G. E. Hubbard who, less than a year after being inducted in 1954, wrote this marvellous diatribe to his parishioners of Wickmere with Wolterton and Little Barningham.



Wickmere Church

October 1955

Newsletter of WICKMERE with WOLTERTON, and LITTLE BARNINGHAM

The Rev. G.E. Hubbard writes - It may come as a surprise for some of you to learn that, by the time this Magazine reaches you, Wickmere Rectory will one more be empty. Until the question of clergy housing is fairly and squarely dealt with by the Church authorities, there will be this coming and going of incumbents which is so prevalent today. After ten months as Rector of Wickmere, I just cannot stomach any longer this dreadful, worn-out, old house with its quarter-mile drive.

Apart from the very bad state of repair of the Rectory, it is all wrong for any parson to be so isolated from his parishioners [and parishioners from their rector], as is the case at Wickmere - to say nothing of being so remote from shops, school, bus routes and civilisation generally.

The garden too! - what a garden, two-and-a-half acres of it, nettles and other weeds everywhere, covering paths, lawns, flower beds, vegetable garden and orchards. Benefice income, though reasonable enough for moderate-sized property, is wholly inadequate to maintain this vast estate in the way it should be maintained. Everything was in a shocking state when we came here last autumn, but it is in far worse condition now.

Another aspect that has decided me to leave Wickmere at short notice and after being Rector for so short a time, is the present acute shortage of man-power in the Church. I consider that I should be frittering away the remaining useful years of my life were I to stay on indefinitely in Wickmere under existing conditions. Rather than waste my time, I have accepted the offer of work in a Liverpool slum parish [Christ Church, Bootle]. I shall be assistant curate to an elderly vicar who is a very sick man, badly crippled with arthritis, and in urgent need of help.

So at the end of this month [September] we shall be exchanging the bracing climate of Norfolk for the sights, sounds and smells of Merseyside; a tumble-down country rectory for a small, down-town terrace house; acres of weeds for a tiny backyard; wide stretches of unwanted glebe for the amenities of civilisation [with a Woolworths and a fried-fish shop just around the corner!] and mere existence for a worthwhile job. And, believe me, I know which I prefer!

Now, all too soon, the time has come for me to wish you all Good-bye. But here's hoping that before long a small convenient rectory will be built in the centre of Wickmere [not miles outside it] for the mutual benefit of my successors and of the people of Wickmere themselves. Good-bye and good luck to you all.

G.E. HUBBARD.



Itteringham Rectory

The Diocese never met the Reverend's hope for a cosy little replacement and instead added insult to injury by providing this deplorable dwelling in Itteringham. Nevertheless, since the clergy gave up on Wickmere Old Rectory there have been some interesting private residents. The grandly named Bolingbroke-Kents made it a lively home with a swimming pool and tennis court which might be expected from the bibliophile Noel who went to the same prep school as Prince Philip and received plaudits from Winston Churchill when he got to Harrow. After his divorce he retreated to Wiveton Hall while his daughter Antonia drove a tuk tuk (motorised rickshaw) to Bangkok. Next came the architecture authority, designer and carrion connoisseur Matthew Rice with his wife Emma Bridgewater who said the place remained "very draughty" although "it was such a lovely place to be, right in the middle of nowhere. I used to call it the Bermuda of Triangle of Norfolk as no-one really knew Wickmere was there". Sadly their marriage has not lasted either but Emma recently received the honour of becoming a Dame from The King for her services to the ceramics industry. Her pottery is in Stoke-on-Trent while Matthew and some of their family live in Oxfordshire she has places in London and high on the Blakeney esker. They sold to true gentry in clan Chief Charles Buchan of Auchmacoy and his wife Sharon who raised their family here before concentrating on the Clan Buchan estate north of Aberdeen; Charles went to Cirencester while Sharon is a Norfolk girl from Thornage.



Across a field to the west of this round towered church towards Squalham is, rather jarringly, a pre-covid Class Q conversion of a concrete framed barn. Another example of Class Q applications at Bale suggests that similar conversions may become more common under the new planning regime that came into effect in December. A farmer made an application last spring which was refused so he made an appeal that was dismissed in November. He then re-applied in December and two months later got an approval. On the wider aspects of easing up rural planning rules the government is talking about exempting BNG requirements on smaller developments of under half an acre. Any representations need to be made sharpish by 10th March at PlanningPolicyConsultation@communities.gov.uk Further recent news is the simplification of the rules for the Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme which will be capped at £100,000 per farm. Smaller farms can apply in June and others in September.

Resuming the circuit southwards takes one to Goose Green which is familiar territory at Hall Farm where we used to hold our Student Days. Apparently the place name Wickmere means a dairy farm by a lake. There aren't dairy cows here now and there are ponds rather than a lake but the landscape would have been different in medieval times. Clearly the layout of the village has altered greatly over the centuries; why else should the Church be half a mile to the north so I reckon the heart of Wickmere could have been around Hall Farmstead. Beyond there is Wolterton Park and The Saracen's Head hostelry as one heads towards Calthorpe. **Jim Alston** at Manor Farm was another kind host of our Student Days and the date of 5th July, 2005 is memorable as that

was when it was announced that London had been chosen to host the 2012 Olympic Games. Jim has supplemented his Jemco signmaking business with his Dofygate automatic traffic barriers becoming more and more widespread. Switching back north towards the eastern end of Wickmere, typically for Norfolk and as at Briston, one passes West End. This is at Beck Farm where Phillida Hurn, the scioness of Wolterton as sister of the late Lord Walpole, lives but I'm not sure that the Zwartbles sheep grazing opposite belong to her. She has always been an animal lover and proud horsewoman while sharing Tony Hurn's Twyford Simmental herd from when they married in the 1980s. They were keen on showing their cattle with the highlight being a win at The Royal Show in 1995. Tony was also churchwarden for many years leading to a trip and award at Buckingham Palace.



A penny for Jim opening Jim opening the gate?

Nearby is a fine Manor House in mellow red brick of the William & Mary period which one passes on a public footpath heading eastwards across the short gap to Aldborough. Again the parish church, towerless this time, is on the edge of the village so that one has to divert down to Doctor's Corner at the southern end of the village and Rectory Farm to reach the heart of the village. Nearby was Poison Green which was where a pit was dug for victims of the Black Death which perhaps explains how the Church became isolated. Even before then a summer solstice fair was being held on The Green and cricket has been played here since 1797. As one approaches it **Billy Hammond** is long gone from Manor Farm along with his famous farm machinery collection. He is much missed by us and the cricket club which he also presided over for many years. Coincidentally 1797 is also the date of Faden's Map of Norfolk which cites the Black Boys pub. Had he been alive Billy wouldn't have been happy with the name change to Cricketers on The Green, not least because it is claimed that the old, allegedly racist, name in fact derived from the dark robes of the monks from a medieval abbey in neighbouring Thurgarton parish. His grandson **Will** now 'tops' the village at the Thurgarton end while his son and our former chairman **Jack** 'tails' it at The Old Rectory to the south-west.



Zwartbles

As I have reported the reactivation of the Filby family's pig farm here since 2020 has been spasmodic and the future seems uncertain as they await the outcome of their appeal. This was against Enforcement Action from NNDC for what they describe as bungalows (I might have called them pigloos) to be removed since they are not being moved and appear to be immobile. This is similar reasoning to what was used by the Planning Inspector in refusing the 3 shepherd's huts at Dam Hill, Edgefield. Nevertheless Pick and Harrison, the agents for the Filbys, are putting a strong case for them to be allowed. Coincidentally EF **Harrold** are using these agents for their new poultry application at Docking Farm near where the solar applications between Cawston and Aylsham have been in the news. This is wholly within Broadland so we should not get the delay like we had over the Limekiln Farm poultry application at the other (northern) end of the Heydon Straight where jurisdiction was shared with NNDC. To complete the picture near here the Attleborough butchers have recently been granted permission to lengthen their stay at the former Cawston College while Exagen have not, as yet, appealed against the refusal on their Warren Wood solar application.



Wells Farm Barningham Bessingham

A couple of miles north from Aldborough across Scarrow Beck brings one to Thurgarton Church, thatched but no tower, with only the late John Neill's Thurgarton Hall and a tiny flint cottage on the crossroads as neighbours. On, westwards to Bessingham where the population has recovered from the 1960s and '70s when it featured nationwide as symptomatic of rural decline. The quiet round towered church stands proudly on the hilltop forming the middle church of three in a ley line between North Barningham (saved by Lady Harrod) a mile to the west and Sustead (another round towered gem) a mile to the east. To complete my circuit we head south-westwards past **Roger Buxton's** Wells Farmhouse with two extraordinary pediments in the gable. Finally we are in Barningham Park again, sometimes called Barningham Winter after the Wynter family and sometimes Town Barningham. Ton or town was applied by the Saxons to a single farmstead or a collection of houses. This is common in Scotland and The North; for example my Dale Town in Yorkshire has a population of 5.



Next **Tuesday, 10th March at 7.30** we have former **Major General Felix Gedney** as our speaker at The Feathers. He has had a fascinating career in many of the world's war zones and done much else but was finally laid low and ended up sleeping on the street. Come and hear the true story and **our President** will be briefing us on our **Pennine tour from Tuesday, 2nd to Thursday, 4th June**.

The last word should go to **our Chairman's** mother-in-law Mrs. Joy Flint who is of good Northern stock, widow of a Norfolk farmer, a lady of great faith and character; she will be 104 this Tuesday.

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