

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Peter Perry-Warnes

Chairman: Martin Jensen

Vice-Chairman: Andrew Ross

www.holtfarmers.club

CLUB MATTERS

Mid April 2026

I am pleased to announce an addition to our summer season with a **Visit to Raynham Hall and Estate on Monday, 22nd June**. Our bespoke travel agent **William Youngs** aims to repeat the success of the event he organised at **Roger Combe's** Bayfield last year. He is liaising with **Tom Pearson**, the Estate Farm Manager who came on our Leics. trip, over hiring Raynham Hall for canapes on the lawn followed by a tour and then dining on Raynham sirloin steak and strawberries & cream. We are being offered a generous discount on the hire of the hall and the in-house caterer can host up to 60 so I trust we can readily meet that number. Since Tom Townshend spoke at our Anniversary Dinner a couple of years ago he has succeeded his father Charles to become the 9th Marquess and, after winning the Aylsham Show Farm Business Competition in 2023 when Tom Pearson was Best Farm Manager, he has been making some significant changes around the Estate. Meanwhile William and **Tom Youngs** (too many Toms) are coming on our trip to Yorkshire where, again, a full contingent will help keep the individual cost down. There are still a few places left and I attach the itinerary with the payment requirements including the £250 deposit.



Please excuse me for disappearing down a rabbit hole (maybe a foxhole?) but, in my rush to publish my last newsletter before Easter, I didn't get round to transcribing the dramatic letter from USAAF Pilot Major Joe Garrett. Jerks Berserk was the name of his bomber which came close to altering Holt history in 1944. It was difficult to read so I have done this as an attachment and now attempt to complete the tale. The Major had, as I mentioned, led previous bombing missions from RAF Mendlesham lying towards the other end of the A140 and was here leading 39 aircraft carrying 100 tons of bombs. This was a 'maximum effort' to take out the German U-boat pens at Kiel as well as vicinal targets. In fact he occupied the co-pilot seat to give pride of place to 1st Lt. Bill Mackey from New Jersey who was still only 21. Coincidentally one of the seven RAF airmen who were killed in the infamous crash of two planes over Holt in 1968 landed in a tree next to Mackey's Hill where there is a car park for Holt Country Park. The average age of the crew, excluding the Major, was 25 and they would only have had about nine months of training. The letter is in fact written in 1989 to the nephew of the Ball Turret Gunner Saul Spivak (21 from Pennsylvania) and this was the last mission of the American 34th Bomb Group as the B-24 Liberators were getting replaced with B-17s. At this time Jimmy Stewart was flying B-24s out of RAF Tibenham and Old Buckenham. Typically the Germans would concentrate their fire on the lead plane and Jerks Berserk soon took a direct hit by flak on the initial bomb run forcing them to 'high tail it out o' there'. This turned out to also be the toughest mission for the Group with virtually every bomber being damaged and four lost. It should be noted that, despite their bravery, the 34th maintained an unenviable record in losing more aircraft in accidents (39) than from enemy activity (34) on their 170 missions.

**B-24 pilot, Jimmy Stewart
playing the piano at a
2nd combat wing HQ
Christmas Party
in December 1944**



To add insult to injury there was a distasteful denouement for the nine crewmen who ditched into the North Sea (rather than the German Ocean). A month later at the end of September the body of Waist Turret Gunner Bernard Sabbath (27) was washed up off Jutland, the north-west point of Denmark. Our Chairman's namesake Mr Jensen, as Receiver of Wrecks, hauled the body ashore but then had to deal with the cruelty of the Wehrmacht who even identified the airman as English; he and other local people objected to the body having been buried in the dunes and found a place for the airman in the local cemetery. In 1948, as with most American casualties, the remains were removed to the Ardennes Cemetery in Belgium and then, for the fourth and final burial, to the Zion Gardens Cemetery in Sgt. Sabbath's home town of Chicago. It was apparent to Mr Jensen that he had been hit by bullets in the chest and thigh so it is now thought that Sabbath and the other eight crewmen were killed by machine gunfire from a U-boat or German aircraft. I hope that Major Garrett wasn't aware of this as he indicates in his letter that they may have died on account of the bad weather after they were spotted in the water. To add this to the survivor's guilt would have compounded the nagging thought that if he hadn't accepted the Flight Engineer's fuel reading the whole crew might have made it back to England.



Our Vice Chairman Andrew Ross was oblivious to the fact that his victory in last year's Malting Barley Competition put him up against Milligan McLeod Contracting of Stalham in the inter-club championship last month. Sadly his sample of Buccaneer was beaten by a Maris Otter one but Martin Jensen was at Salhouse Lodge to collect the reserve champion prize card on Andrew's behalf. Our President was also one of Michael Pollitt's guests and Simon Finlay, the excellent photographer regularly used by Stalham, caught this exquisite shot. Peter is captured between two giants, the guest speaker Hugh Pym from the BBC whose height of two metres was sometimes used for the required distancing under covid rules, and the equally impressive William Love who was chosen as Vice Chairman while winning their Cantley Cup for Walcott Farms in the sugar beet competition.

William Love



Hugh Pym



Will Wilson

Another fresh face is Will Wilson who has joined our club after moving to the Dereham area a couple of years ago. He was involved with silage clamps and sheeting while also being a business development leader for over twenty years. Will is now part of the New Anglian Growth Hub focusing on rural business support and advice. He is keen to hear from anyone at william.wilson@norfolk.gov.uk and on 0300 333 6536. The Norfolk Rural Business Awards are coming up and Norfolk County Council are actively looking for entries specifically for Rural Innovation, Best Food & Farming Champion and Best Woman in Agriculture. I have already suggested a couple of members but please speak to Will or get in touch with him. We are also taking soundings as to whether we might resurrect our Clay Pigeon Shooting Competition to add to our Malting Barley one where a challenger to Andrew's crown is needed.

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