

Highlights of 2014 – the secretary’s annual report

Website success - It has been a surprisingly active year with even greater involvement of members, and especially from an increasing number of new recruits to our ranks. The success of the club’s website, which was launched without too much ceremony in January, has attracted a total of close to 13,000 visitors. It cost £360, a modest investment to create the website, plus annual hosting fees of circa £84 – clearly worthwhile. With the enthusiastic support of the club’s webmaster, Tim Papworth, who initiated and has driven the project forward, a steady flow of news, information and meeting details have been posted to the website. It is clear that putting meeting summaries and committee reports is an effective means of keeping the members informed.

Ties - As our stock of polyester ties was exhausted, a bolder quality version of the club’s distinctive emblem – featuring a 100pc increase in the size of the Stalham hoe – has been produced – in silk. The tie is also slightly broader, longer and is available in claret, navy blue and green. This represented a significant cost of £1964.70 for 150 ties. Although the order was placed in early October, it did take slightly longer to arrive – a slow boat from China, possibly. The cost is £20 each but for a special early bird discount, any two colours may be obtained for £35 until the annual meeting. Contact the secretary.

Thanks - The club is extremely grateful for the continued support of key members at the East Norfolk NFU branch – former chairman Christopher Deane and his colleagues including David Faulkner and James Taylor. Additionally, they generously insure our trophies through the NFU Mutual and even paid for mailing the annual programme, saving the club a further £65.

Crop competitions - The support of all judges is much appreciated, including Ken Matthews for trekking through fields of sugar beet, Denis Walsh, who has been casting an eagle eye over the club’s potato entries for more than 20 years, and also to Sarah Bebb, of British Sugar, for joining the secretary and chairman in judging the best two-acres of sugar beet. Her further help in compilation of results for the Cantley Cup and especially for handling the beet samples has been tremendous. NB – the loan of scales and his beet knife by Alan Beck was invaluable! A new approach to getting more cereal samples will be adopted this year. The support of members and judging team, co-ordinated by Chris Borrett, of Adams & Howling, is also valued. As the chairman has noted, there was success too for the club with a first-time entry from William Sands in the annual barley championship against Holt.

Bowls/ 10-pin and clay pigeon - After many years of struggling to recruit entrants, and thanks to Robert Stimpson and friends for efforts over many years, it has been decided with Holt & District Farmers’ Club to let the annual contest fallow. It may be revived in a different format, possibly as more of a social occasion, so please watch out for details on the website. There was clear support for the bowls/ 10-pin, which has been organised by William Donald for many years. When it was proposed for the first time to include 10-pin, again with teams of 18 players on both sides, some eyebrows were raised. However, the evening was a great success – so more players, please for Friday, February 20 at Rossi’s. And who knows among our expanding ranks, there may be some over-looked talent. Names to the secretary, Rob Norman or chairman-elect Luke Paterson please.

Special thanks - In my report, I’d like to thank members for support, especially the former chairman Christopher Deane during my period of illness in April and also to the many visitors during my three-week stay at the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital. On reflection, trying to plan and organise a visit from a hospital bed to Oxnead Hall’s gardens to see Beverly and David Aspinall’s efforts to safeguard the only surviving last example of a Tudor pleasure ground, may not have been the most sensible. However, the evening was favoured with sunshine and everyone enjoyed the drinks and visit.

Charitable donations - A donation of £200 (on our website) to the East Anglian Air Ambulance was made following the Oxnead visit and another of £500 was made in April on the club's behalf by your secretary to the RNAA for the Spring Fling.

Speakers - As ever, we're always extremely grateful to speakers, who often travel considerable distances to visit the club. We had larger than usual attendances to hear Susie Emmett and also Peter Hough speak. Special thanks too to Norfolk police commissioner Stephen Bett, who took more than two hours to return home to Thornham in the thick fog after addressing our annual dinner.

Autumn programme - This was completed in record early time – maybe having more time since I left my role at the Eastern Daily Press was a factor. A new club attendance record, a big red book, has been introduced – and at the first meeting in December, some 52 names signed.

Future programme - Excellent progress has been achieved with the 2015 autumn programme.

Dates for the diary - Our summer garden outing – Wednesday, June 17 to Corpusty, with conducted tour. Details to follow.

Wednesday, October 21. Get in the mood for Halloween with a ghost tour with Norwich's only Man in Black. Starting at the Adam & Eve (by the courts), there is a supper option as well. Total cost, with supper beforehand, about £15.

Then on Wednesday, November 11 – Caroline Drummond, of LEAF, will be talking about the success of Open Farm Sunday and other projects.

On Wednesday, December 9, Rob Ferguson, son of long-standing members Murray, will be giving an illustrated talk about some of the exotic holiday locations, including some genuinely unique options available for his clients.

We start the New Year 2016 with Suffolk farmer William Kendall, who is a cousin of Sir Peter Kendall on January 13, 2016. His track record and involvement with marketing includes Green & Black Chocolate (sold to Cadbury in 2006) and the New Covent Garden Soup Company.

Financial -A further summary will be available soon detailing the financial highlights.

If there's anything further, I'm only too happy to help. Please contact me on 01603 486997.

Michael Pollitt

Secretary/ treasurer

February 2015.