

Stalham Farmers' Club January 2017

There was a candlelight welcome at the Norfolk Mead Hotel, Coltishall, for the club's first meeting of 2017.

Welcome – The chairman Jonathan Deane, welcomed the guest speaker, Vince Thurkettle, and a number of members from two young farmers' clubs.

And fortunately, a brief electrical power break had only delayed the “golden themed” meal by a quarter of an hour. A total of 35 members and guests signed the attendance book.

Apologies – These had been received from the president, William Donald, vice-chairman Henry Alston, and Robin Baines, John Grier, John Grange and Rob Norman.

New members – none.

Secretary's report – Michael Pollitt said that a full report of the 175th anniversary meeting on December 14, which had been attended by 42 members, had been on the club's website for the past month.

He also said that further reports and details of club meetings from the 1870s and also between 1914 and 1918 were now also on the website in the “early years” section.

He invited support for the forthcoming bowls and ten-pin evening against Holt Farmers' Club on Friday, February 24 at Rossi's, North Walsham, 4.15pm. Holt had already recruited 20 members to play – and encouraged members to step up to the plate.

All the crop competitions, except the Cantley Cup for the best overall performance by a beet grower, had now been judged. The trophies and prize cards would be presented at the annual dinner on Wednesday, March 15 by the guest speaker, Sir Nicholas Bacon. And applications for tickets would be sent out later in January.

Correspondence – Three letters of thanks had been received for the club's generous donations of £2,000 each – raised at the club's 175th anniversary summer drinks party – from the East Anglian Air Ambulance, the YANA (You Are Not Alone) Project and Thornage Hall. These would be placed on the club's website.

Speaker – The guest, Vince Thurkettle, who was a chartered forester, turned gold prospector and author from Great Hockham in Breckland. He had found the largest nugget of gold in Britain, weighing more than 97g or three oz – having spent almost a quarter of a century with the Forestry Commission before deciding at the age of 49 to follow his dream.

Mr Thurkettle, who had been the Forestry Commission's head of marketing and deputy director in eastern England, made his life-changing decision at the age of 40. But it took nine years of saving before he could implement his grand plan. He had combined his passion for gold with his forestry work for many years. He was Britain's championship goldpanner seven times and won a world championship gold medal in Canada in 2007. A former president of

the World Goldpanning Association for seven years, he found the nugget around the wreck of the Royal Charter, off the coast of Anglesey, in 2012. This iron ship had been returning from Australia with 521 passengers and crew when it was driven against the coast on October 26, 1859. It had been estimated to have carried some £120m of gold, mostly by the successful prospectors. And Mr Thurkettle explained that while significant amounts of the gold had been recovered, because the precious metal has a specific weight of 19.3 – it was possible that amounts could be recovered from the seabed around the wreck.

In a talk, sprinkled with anecdotes and considerable humour, he urged the young members of his audience including young farmers from Acle and North Walsham to rise to the challenge to make the most of their life and their ambition.

He had also written the highly-successful book, the wood fire handbook, which was the essential guide for anyone burning wood to heat their home. It had sold widely in Britain and even in France and Scandinavia and even north America too.

A large number of questions were asked by members and the meeting was drawn to a close with a vote of thanks by a former club treasurer Hannah Wait, of North Walsham YFC. She thanked the club for welcoming the young farmers to supper and for a lovely meal. Adding that copies of the club's calendar were also available, price £5, in aid of the East Anglian Air Ambulance.

Mr Deane, in closing, reminded members that the annual meeting would be held on February 8 at the Norfolk Mead, 7.30pm.