

Opening meeting, 178th season - November 19th, 2019

Our guest speaker, Prof Andrew Lovett, of the University of East Anglia, was welcomed by the chairman, Henry Alston, and vice-chairman Chris Borrett at Vera's Coffee Shop (A G Meale's) on Wednesday, November 13 as a total of 16 members enjoyed an excellent supper.

Welcome - The chairman welcomed more than 30 members and guests to the opening meeting of the 178th season.

Reflection - Members were asked to stand in memory of former club members and other leading members of the agricultural community, who have died since the club's last indoor meeting in January.

Apologies – Louis Baugh, Greg Smith, Sir William Cubitt, Jason Cantrill and Nigel “jiving” Cooke.

Chairman's summary - Mr Alston said there had been a busy programme of club activities in the past nine months including the annual bowls and 10-pin competition against Holt & District Farmers' Club. Although the club finished second in both sections, it had been an enjoyable evening finishing with supper.

The annual dinner in March at the Boat House, Ormesby, had been well-attended, and then the club took on Holt again in the annual clay pigeon match. Stalham finished second.

However, the annual farm walk by invitation of our president, Thomas Love and family, had been an outstanding success. Mr Alston reflected that fortunately the crumbling cliff edge at Happisburgh had supported the party of some 90 members and guests. He thanked the NFU and others for supporting the visit.

A very successful visit to the East Anglian Air Ambulance had been held, arranged by club member and EAAA chairman Sir William Cubitt. The 22 members had been briefed about the expansion plans and also had invaluable training on CPR and the use of defibrillators. Members raised £325 for the EAAA, who responded to the chairman's request to make a donation following the visit.

In the annual county quiz, Stalham – thanks to George Gay – finished runners-up in a combined team with three members of Holt & District Farmers' Club. The three-point margin of victory saw the trophy regained by Dereham Farm Machinery Club as a total of 11 teams competed for the honours.

Secretary's report - Michael Pollitt reminded members to submit their grain samples at the December meeting and also said that a new competition would be held against Stoke Ferry Agricultural Society for a wheat champion of champions.

Samples could also be left by permission of Neal Sands at his Brunstead works.

He thanked the competition judges for their efforts – Denis Walsh, potatoes; Ken Matthews, whole crop sugar beet and Sarah Bebb, best two-acre of sugar beet. One member questioned how water-logged fields and flooded potato crops might be judged!

New member - Becky Collen, of the NFU's North Walsham office, was proposed by Christopher Deane, Seconded by John Grier.

Guest speaker - Prof Andrew Lovett, of the UEA's School of Environmental Sciences, spoke about the “Challenges and opportunities of a changing climate for Norfolk Agriculture.

Born and brought up in Norwich, he went to Thorpe Grammar and then to university about as far west as possible. After graduating from Aberystwyth, he had several academic posts before returning to Norwich in 1990.

Appointed to the chair of geography in 2007, he was co-leader of the Wensum test catchment project from 2010. In a 35-minute presentation, which later sparked lengthy discussion from a number of members, Prof Lovett highlighted the threats and identified some potential opportunities for the agricultural industry over the coming decades.

He said that there was convincing weather data over 30 years in Norfolk and Suffolk, dating from 1961 and again from 1981, which indicated the extent of significant change. It was now possible by using GIS (geographical information systems) to chart the impacts in specific areas of 5 sq kms. Climate change was now having a marked impact, he said. The temperature data was clear – higher average summer and warmer winter, decreasing summer rainfall and more intensive rainfall in winter. With emissions of greenhouse gases still increasing, and particularly by agriculture, there has to be major changes to reduce levels of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane, he warned.

While there was some better news, for example the UK's reductions of carbon dioxide by ending coal/oil fueled power stations to generate electricity, agriculture was a major contributor to greenhouse emissions. Using artificial fertilisers released nitrous oxide but farmers could make changes to their systems, he argued. For example, widespread use of cover crops and boosting organic levels in soils could help to lock up carbon and benefit the environment.

Prof Lovett stressed that there were no simple and easy solutions, but farmers were the best-placed to make a major contribution to the environment over the next decades. And, a major boost to farming's productivity was also possible, which could improve the industry's impact on the environment.

After taking numerous questions, Prof Lovett, who was presented with one of the club's silk ties by the chairman, he was thanked by Charlotte Hovey. She had written a thesis on a similar topic several years ago.

The next meeting – Wednesday, December 11 – Graham Duncanson on his life as a veterinary surgeon.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.