

# Chairman's report for 2014.

Neil Jordan, chairman, said: "It seems impossible that 12 months has nearly passed; the year started with a vote of thanks and the conclusion of the formalities at the 2014 annual dinner, where the club welcomed guest speaker Stephen Bett, Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner.

The bowls and newly introduced 10 pin bowling evening was a great success with Holt unfortunately taking home the trophies, there should be a good appetite for victory this year!

A rather packed week in June started off the summer activities with an evening visit to the gardens at Oxnead Hall, by kind permission of Beverly and David Aspinall. 26 club members enjoyed a talk and a tour around, followed by supper at the Skeyton Goat.

The next day saw 21 club members taking to the road for the first two-day away trip. Former chairman Christopher Deane organised a seamless itinerary which was followed with precision as we revealed our passports and headed into Suffolk. Our first host was John Rix, Lodge Farm, Great Horkeley, who welcomed members and gave a tour of the farm and root/vegetable storage facilities along with, the most impressive part, the on-site packing plant. Once dressed in hair nets and some ill-fitting hi-vis jackets, we watched automated robots packing onions into various prepack displays for different retail outlets – from 3 onions in a net, bulk trays and netted bags.

From here we travelled further to Barleylands Farm, Billericay, where Peter and Chris Philpot provided a superb lunch followed with a tour around a farmyard development; which included a museum, mini shopping and children's education centre to name a few. One thing club members certainly learnt here was diversification - If there's a space or a barn on your home farm - rent it out or convert it! We concluded the tour with a tour around their Boyton Hall farm looking at crops and the problems they have associated with heavy land farming.

Fully refreshed after a jolly pleasant evening and night sleep, Satellite navigation took us, well I say most of us, to our final visit at A W Mortier Farms, Woodbridge. With 19 of us arriving at Cedar Farm, it was clear we were 2 men down. Some 20 minutes later, our past chairman and associate arrived after apparently mis-typing the address into their sat nav!

The trip was concluded with a lovely lunch at The Ship Inn, Dunwich. My extended thanks go to Christopher Deane and Neal Sands for their great effort in organising a hugely enjoyable trip.

Friday evening saw the annual clay pigeon shooting take place against Holt, with few members on each team entering battle, we unfortunately lost. Thanks to Robert Stimpson for organising this over the years.

July 3<sup>rd</sup> saw almost perfect weather with 93 members welcomed to Hall Farm Neatishead, where Louis and Fran Baugh hosted the chairman's annual farm walk. All enjoyed looking at a range of arable cropping, the former RAF Neatishead base and moving down to the marshes for a walk through national nature reserves where environmental stewardship is a key focus. Supper and drinks were enjoyed in the farm house garden and concluded an enjoyable tour of Neatishead hall farm enterprises.

The winter programme up started in October 16th with a behind the scenes visit around John Lewis. Richard Marks, head of the Norwich branch, welcomed members and guests and gave an interesting talk about the history of the shop building and the evolution from Bonds to John Lewis as it stands today. An insight into modern day retailing was given along with the future visions and challenges that lay ahead.

The November meeting welcomed Suzie Emmett, through visiting 72 countries; members were given her global view on agriculture which was warmly received and certainly gave many some thought provoking facts.

December saw Peter Hough from Napier Brown reflect on the challenging sugar industry that is a key crop to many club members. Members enjoyed a good question and answer session at the end of the presentation.

The New Year kicked off with members from Acle and North Walsham Young Farmers' Clubs invited to join our January meeting where Sam Steggles, a Norfolk goats' cheese producer, gave a talk into his rapidly growing cheese business. After recently winning an award of a global cheese award at the International Cheese show in London , members and guests sampled some of these cheeses and also learnt about the recent introduction of beauty products which were available for purchase at the end of the evening.

Neil Jordan. February 2015.