

12th November 2014 Meeting

Minutes of the opening meeting of the 174th season. Sutton Staithe Hotel, 8pm.

In the presence of 46 members and guests, the chairman Neil Jordan asked for a minute's silence in memory of the late club president, David Ritchie.

The club's president, elected in 2010, had died on November 2 at his Ludham home. He was 82.

A warm welcome was also extended to Jimmy Fowell, vice-chairman of Holt & District Farmers' Club, who had been invited to supper.

Apologies: Ken Leggett, Christopher Deane, Neal Sands, Alistair Mackenzie, Alan Beck, Robert Gray.

A brief summary of the last meeting, which had taken place on Wednesday, January 14, was read by the secretary, Michael Pollitt. He said that a total of 71 members and guests, including members of Acle and North Walsham Young Farmers' Clubs, had enjoyed a supper and then a presentation by the Farmers Weekly Young Farmer of the Year, Jonathan MacInnes-Skinner. He was presently farming about 1,500 acres in Breckland and included several livestock enterprises and was one of largest rearing ducks for Gressingham. His achievements ahead of his 25th birthday were very impressive.

Chris Phillipo was welcomed as a new member.

Future activities – these included bowls/ 10-pin bowling and also the proposed expedition into Essex – the inaugural chairman's visit. Christopher Deane outlined the thrust of his proposal, which was supported by many members.

Robert Norman gave the vote of thanks and the meeting closed at 9.45pm.

Chairman's summary of the year.

Neil Jordan outlined highlights – the first 10-pin bowling competition had been a great success although Stalham hoped to win a trophy before too long.

Christopher Deane's venture into Essex had been a success too.

A visit to Oxnead Hall, by invitation of Beverley and David Aspinall, had been enjoyed by more than 36 members and guests followed by supper at the Skeyton Goat. The garden – one of the country's only surviving examples of Tudor pleasure grounds – was under restoration.

The chairman's farm walk at Neatishead Hall, by invitation of Fran and Louis Baugh, was enjoyed about 100 members and guests. All were hugely impressed by the range and diversity of the farm and enjoyed the chance to appreciate one of the finest views in Norfolk – across the valley to How Hill.

The clay shoot, again organised by Robert Stimpson, had taken place. Stalham finished in second place!

The autumn started with a tour on October 16 of the Norwich arm of John Lewis. Head of branch Richard Marks welcomed about 28 members and talked about the retail challenges facing the long-established business, which marked its 150th anniversary this year. Once the store, then Bonds, sold 1,000 hats every Saturday.

The chairman presented Mr Marks with a tie, with the club's 1841 logo!

New members – Five were welcomed.

Sir William Cubitt, who was a speaker at the club's annual dinner three years ago, was proposed for membership by William Donald, seconded James Paterson.

Sam Summers, proposed by Tim Papworth, seconded Ian Deane.

Will More, proposed Alastair Ross, seconded John Lockhart.

Rob Hirst, proposed Robert Norman, seconded Louis Baugh.

Abigail Deane, proposed by Andrew Sands, seconded Nigel Wright.

Vice-chairman

Luke Paterson, who had agreed to serve, was welcomed. Mr Jordan thanked Alan Beck for his efforts, advice and help as a temporary vice-chairman since the last annual meeting in February.

Crop competition results were reported.

The Potato Cup

1 Robin Baines & Co, of Hoveton. A crop of Innovator. The 4.5ha (11.2 acres) field of second early, irrigated, for French fry production, was grown at Ludham on land on Mr Ritchie's farm. Runner-up was Nick Deane, of Bure Valley Potatoes, with 45 acres of Markies, grown by Nelson County Potatoes. A field of Innovator for McCain Foods at Tuttington, near Aylsham, grown by LF Papworth, of Felmingham, took third place. Denis Walsh, of Greenvale AP, was the judge.

Sugar beet – whole crop

The judge was Ken Matthews, of Stoke Ferry Agricultural Society.

Two points split the top three places. A field at Tuttington took honours for LF Papworth. The runner-up was the father and son team, Alan and Geoffrey Beck, of CN Beck & Sons, of Brunstead, near Stalham. The third placed crop was grown by Milligen & McLeod, of East Ruston.

Two-acre results to be announced in December.

Committee meeting – To be held on Thursday, November 20.

Fund-raising – Good wishes were sent to a member, Emily Page, who was planning to trek the Sahara to raise funds for Yana (You Are Not Alone) the following week.

The speaker, Susie Emmett, from Oxborough in west Norfolk, who had visited a total of 77 countries, talked about the global perspective of agriculture.

When at school, she had been advised that if she was determined to consider farming as a career there was only one option – marry a farmer. She had done so!

On a more serious note, Susie invited the gathering with a show of hands to indicate whether they were optimistic about the future or not. To her surprise, nine out of the ten members were optimistic but no one was actually pessimistic. And a further show of hands revealed that the club had more than a dozen members – all under 35, also to her surprise.

After studying agriculture, she had later gone into broadcasting and notably with the BBC's World Service. Sadly, after many years, senior editors at the BBC had decided to scrap world agricultural coverage – one of the most extraordinary decisions in her view.

Susie, who was flying out to South Africa to lead a visit of farmers to the Cape the next week, then invited members to suggest the names of countries to prompt discussion on farming. She praised Zambia, which had pioneered a version of min-till cultivation as a model.

When Senegal in west Africa was mentioned – somewhat of a poser for many members. However, her demonstration of the location by patting her bottom ensure that no future quiz question on this aspect of geography will shortly be forgotten.

She said efforts to increase production of sweet potatoes, ideally suited to the near totally sandy landscape, has been proving very successful. Further, efforts to grow top-quality and tasty melons had also made it possible to harness the local enthusiasm of hard-working people – they were working with an increasing number of UK-based companies to export prime produce to Europe. At the same time, this was creating local employment and helping to raise living standards and opportunities in land-based work.

After fielding many questions from members, fellow members of her sailing club, Jonathan Deane gave the vote of thanks.

The meeting was closed at 9.25pm, and the chairman presented a copy of Alec Douet's book, *Breaking New Ground a History of Norfolk Agriculture 1914 to 1984*.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, December 10 when Peter Hough, of Napier Brown, will be speaking.