

Stalham Farmers' Club

Wednesday, January 13, 2016

Norfolk Mead, Coltishall. 7.30pm.

Inspiring businesses.

One of the largest attendances at a club meeting was welcomed by the chairman, Luke Paterson. A total of 34 members and guests had enjoyed a supper featuring pan-seared cod, he said.

Mr Paterson asked the 82 members and guests to stand to remember a great supporter of the club, Cecil Callow. He had been club chairman in 1982 and over many years had supported club competitions and been a frequent trophy winner too.

He was especially delighted to welcome so many members of North Walsham YFC – including the 14 to supper as guests of the club – and also Suffolk farmer and entrepreneur, William Kendall. The attendance book was signed by 57 members and guests.

Minutes – a full report of the last meeting on December 9 and the guest speaker Rob Ferguson's address has been on the website for more than a month.

Apologies – The following had been notified to the secretary – Greg Smith, Alec Dinsdale, Alison Ritchie, John McLeod, Josh Grimmer, Charles Lockhart, Abby Deane, Roy Houlden, Nick Hood, Jason Cantrill, and Robin Baines.

Secretary's report – Michael Pollitt said that the club's £500 donation to the RABI's Cumbria flood appeal had been greatly appreciated. With a donation by Holt & District Farmers' Club, a total of about £1,000 has been donated to help farming's flood victims in Cumbria.

Unfortunately, it had not been possible to qualify for CPD professional training points but a request would be made for the next meeting in February.

Further, it was confirmed that Robert Carter, president of the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association has invited the club to visit Letheringsett on Thursday, May 26. Details of the early evening visit would be given to members.

An appeal was also made to members to support the annual bowls/ 10-pin match against Holt Farmers on Friday, February 26, starting at 4.30pm. Teams of 18 were needed for both bowls and 10-pin and the evening, including meal at Rossi's, North Walsham, would be £20. Members were also invited to indicate availability in the attendance book – five bowlers and 10 ten-pins signed.

Details of the annual dinner – on Wednesday, March 16 – would be sent to members later this month. Again, the secretary highlighted the need for prompt payment – no IOUs or post-dated cheques would be accepted.

175th anniversary celebrations – Vice-chairman Jonathan Deane said that plans were at an advanced stage for the drinks' evening on Saturday, June 18 by permission of Peter Boardman at How Hill Farm. Further, the club was planning a visit to northern France in June 17 – A second Norman Conquest!

Guest speaker – The chairman introduced William Kendall, who had just returned from a visit to Burma – and the region close to the border with China – to talk about the theme, Inspiring Businesses.

He explained why he “loved business” and how he had been regarded, somewhat, as the “Black Sheep” of a long-established farming family in the Biggleswade area of Bedfordshire. At an early age, he had become fascinated by selling rather than the techniques and challenges of growing – hence being regarded as slightly unorthodox. One of his earliest (and successful) ventures had given him a taste for business. When there had been a glut of walnuts, he and his cousin, Peter (later to become president of the National Farmers' Union, picked and filled a wheelbarrow of nuts to distribute around the village. While Peter pushed the wheelbarrow, he was selling pounds of walnuts. Then, when there had been a surplus of rhubarb, he started selling it from the farmgate – and then it was keeping hens. He learned an early invaluable lesson in cashflow management from this enterprise – because it was highly cash-generative, his takings were “borrowed” for other household expenses. And his “piggy bank” contained too many IOUs from senior family members – who when pressed to pay were sometimes reluctant to write a cheque. And with £1,000 or more at stake in the 1970s, it was not exactly small potatoes. A valuable lesson.

Mr Kendall said that he had an extremely varied early career – reading law, qualifying as a barrister, a short spell in the Army, attending a business school in Paris and then working in the City. His first challenge, the New Covent Garden Soup Company, had also come slightly by chance and when he joined, although he didn't realise at the time, had a £2m annual turnover but was losing £1.5m! Fortunately, by very hard work, good luck and changing consumer fortunes, the business later became a financial success. It then led to another venture, Green & Blacks, which was also struggling. With a small group of investors, including some from the USA who had never even tasted the chocolate, the business grew from annual turnover of circa £1.5m to £70m. As the first Fair Trade product – it found a niche and was eventually bought by Cadbury in about 2006. On reflection, it had been a mistake to sell the business but that was part of the UK mentality – to sell successful enterprises rather than run them for decades and generations.

In a 45-minute address, he said that farmers/ growers needed to recognise the vital importance of promoting and marketing their produce and their industry. A series of broad industry marketing/ advertising initiatives were highly-questionable but urged

especially young people to think very seriously about starting new businesses and enterprises. It can be done and it is not just a case of finding an absolutely brilliant idea – sometimes, it is working out how something could be done better, more efficiently and more profitably.

On the home front, he was now running a 450-acre farm in Suffolk – and selling produce by adding value. Hence his chickens laid eggs v- sold fresh to the local Waitrose. “I don’t want to sell my grain in a lorry load. I want to add value,” he said. Adding that he had bought a flour mill to produce home-milled flour – another quiet success.

Mr Kendall, who spent more than half an hour answering a range of questions, said this latest challenge as chairman of the £10m business, Cawston Press – making a range of non-alcoholic quality fruit drinks – was among many of his latest interests.

He was thanked by Sarah Ellero, on behalf of North Walsham YFC, who also said that members had much appreciated the supper invitation.

The chairman presented a club tie to Mr Kendall. The meeting was closed at 8.59pm.

Next meeting – Wednesday, February 17 – and annual meeting when Prof Kevin Hiscock, of the UEA, will talk about his research to minimise pollution.





