

Stalham Farmers' Club

November 16, 2016

A total of 16 members and guests joined the chairman for supper at the Norfolk Mead Hotel.

The club's 175th season began with a minute's silence following the death of two senior members. Members stood in memory of a former president, Roger Beck, and another long-standing member, Peter Boardman, who had generously hosted the club's 175th summer drinks party on a memorable June evening at How Hill Farm.

The chairman, Jonathan Deane, welcomed 30 members and guests. He said that Mr Beck had been regarded as "Mr Stalham Farmer" and that Mr Boardman had clearly enjoyed hosting this special event – and that his father had also been a former club secretary too.

Apologies – The president William Donald, vice-chairman Henry Alston, Jason Cantrill, Luke Paterson, Greg Smith.

New members – Nigel Cooke, proposed by Ken Leggett and seconded by Christopher Deane. This was unanimously agreed.

Chairman's report – Jonathan Deane reported on club activities since the annual meeting, which had included the highly successful visit to Mr and Mrs Robert Carter's Letheringsett Old Hall Estate, near Holt. After a brisk walk, members had then been treated to a most generous supper by their hosts. In thanks, the club presented on their behalf a £500 donation to farming's charity, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution.

The relaunched clay shoot had been a success for Stalham as Charlie Lockhart secured the top gun award against Holt & District Farmers' Club.

The highlight was the 175th anniversary summer drinks party – greatly enjoyed by about 270 members and guests. (A complete photographic record is also on the club's website, which has now attracted a total of more than 55,500 visits). Again, great thanks to Peter Boardman, the organising committee and all those who provided help and financial support for the day.

Then members met at the, Larling, Angel for lunch before heading to John & Melinda Raker's Croxton Park for a farm walk, again in the sunshine, before tea and then departing for a tour of the Stanford training area. Mr Deane recalled that the club's last visit had been in 1988 – during his first term as chairman. Again, this had been a great evening which ended with a visit to Frog Hill – famous for the opening and closing scenes of the BBC comedy, Dad's Army. The club made a donation of £175 to Army charities.

Forthcoming events – An outing to Yarmouth Stadium on Friday, December 9. Tickets, £37 for the deluxe package. Please inform the secretary if you like to join the party.

Mr Deane said that a special menu would be featured at the December 14 meeting – just three days before the club's formal 175th anniversary. Again, he hoped that as many members would support the supper beforehand, which all members are most welcome to attend. He also announced plans for a club tour to Holland, possibly in late May but more likely to be the first week of July. He asked for an expression of interest and about half a dozen members said that they would be interested in joining the expedition. Another half a dozen were also interested. It would be a two-night stay, probably flying from Norwich, and costing in the region of £500. He would report further details at the next meeting.

Secretary's report.

Michael Pollitt reported that a three-strong team including Ken Leggett and Nigel Cooke had finished third in the inter-country quiz at Easton/Otley College last month – ahead of Holt’s team. Although there was no trophy to add to the club’s cabinet, it was a start.

He also reported that the overwhelming majority of members had taken action on increasing subscriptions to £20pa, the new rate. He hoped that others would follow suit and amend standing orders to the new rate from January 1st and pay outstanding amounts by the year end.

He also announced that the club would be purchasing copies of a definitive history of Alec Douet’s book on Norfolk agriculture, “Breaking New Ground, Agriculture in Norfolk 1914 to 1972.” It has been out of print since 2012 and copies would cost £25 and be available, hopefully, by Christmas.

Prompted by Tim Papworth, the secretary also urged members to submit grain samples by the next meeting at the latest or deliver to SAM at Brumstead.

Members also agreed to donate £300 to the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association to help with the cost of staging the 2017 Spring Fling.

Mr Deane then introduced the speaker, John Packman, chief executive of the Broads Authority. In the next 80 minutes, he initiated a lively discussion with members as he highlighted many of the challenges facing the Broads – from a combination of climate change to the growing pressures on this unique area of East Anglia.

Mr Packman suggested that three key challenges revolved around climate change – and the threats to the freshwater Broads from rising sea levels and coastal erosion – and the need for a more integrated catchment management approach. He said that the Broads Authority was responsible for some 300 sq km but that the total catchment area was about 3,000 sq km. There was much support from members for an integrated approach to catchment management as part of an overall strategy to maintain and enhance the character of the Broads. And thirdly, formulating new environmental measures, and not least reacting to new political imperatives for a replacement farm support model as Britain prepared to leave the EU was another major challenge.

The economic importance of the Broads and its special environment character for wildlife and also for leisure was greatly valued, he said. But, farmers, who were the natural custodians of the countryside, also had a part to play in evolving new policies.

On another note, Mr Packman said that the Authority, now responsible for planning, had backed plans for what had become a successful extension to the Norfolk Mead Hotel and creating jobs and boosting tourism.

Mr Packman, who answered numerous questions from members, suggested that the industry could help to evolve a new “greener farming” strategy. He said that Norfolk had evolved a unique solution to the 1980s Halvergate environmental conflict – and that the pilot experimental Broads Grazing Marshes Scheme launched in 1985, had evolved into national ESAs (environmental sensitive area) scheme – later adopted by Brussels.

New “greener support” policies for the long-term benefit of the Broads could help to secure vital funding for the agricultural industry, members of the country’s oldest farming club have been told.

In response to questions from members, Mr Packman argued that there was real merit in “a bottom-up solution” to new farm support measures.

He was thanked by Simon Daniels, who said that Mr Packman’s leadership over the past 15 years, had been “brilliant.” Members warmly thanked the speaker, who was presented with a silk tie by the chairman.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.