

December Meeting at Wroxham Barns

A total of 22 members and guests, including the speaker, Anna Hill, joined the chairman William Sands for a two-course supper - seared fillet of pork and sticky toffee pudding - on Wednesday, December 8, 2023.

The club's president George Gay, who sent his apologies, was unable to attend because of a prior family engagement.

The chairman welcomed about 30 members and guests and especially the guest speaker, who was recovering from a tooth extraction earlier that day.

Apologies – George Gay, Louis Baugh, Christopher Deane, Nick Deane, Graham Duncanson, Alistair and Junko Wright.

New members – Will Finn, proposed by Jo Willetts, seconded Paul Corfield, and Andrew Hill, of Horningtoft, proposed by James Hill, and Sam Hill.

Secretary's update – Michael Pollitt said the judging of the beet competitions – the whole crop and best two-acre - had been completed. Thanks to Sam Summers, of British Sugar, for his time. The results would be announced at the club's annual dinner in March. He thanked the chairman's farm staff for pulling his car free of a heap of poultry manure – and enabling the judging to proceed.

Entries for the grain competition must be submitted by mid-January for judging to be carried out.

The club's email list of members has been updated and collated by Jo Willetts. Please send updates to her. The next challenge is to remind a small number of members to increase the annual subscription to £20pa, due on January 2 each year. Some are still paying £10. They will be reminded and asked to pay the correct amount.

The chairman then introduced Anna Hill, presenter on BBC Radio 4's Farming Today programme. Living in Norwich, Anna has been a member of the small team producing the programme, broadcast at 5.45am each weekday morning, since 1994.

She started with the BBC in 1985 as a radio journalist in Southampton with Radio Solent, then on other BBC local radio stations across southern England. Then in 1989, she joined Radio 4 as a continuity announcer and news reader. When the BBC wanted to recruit a journalist with a non-agricultural background, she became part of the Farming Team. The programme has increased its audience to more than one million daily – quite a feat for a programme broadcast from 5.45am. An increasing number, especially younger listeners, followed on BBC Sounds.

She also presented On Your Farm and won the radio industry's top award, a Sony Gold, for her programme on the flooding on a family farm in Wrexham in 2000. One of the judges noted: "You know why you won? Because you shut up, listened, and let people tell their own story."

Her career all too often had revolved around reporting animal diseases – from BSE (so-called 'mad cow' disease), classical swine fever in 2000, and Bovine TB, avian flu, and then what became the world's worst foot-and-mouth epidemic from February 2001. She had interviewed Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had just sacked agriculture minister Nick Brown. Apparently, the PM commented afterwards that he had survived a hard interview.

As one of a small team, numbering less than seven colleagues, producing and presenting a range of rural national farming and countryside programmes, the annual budget was tiny. She was especially concerned at the severity of cuts to BBC local radio, which had been a traditional training ground for so many journalists. As one who had honed her skill in local radio, it was deeply worrying for the future of quality public service broadcasting.

She suggested too that the cost of a TV licence, set to rise to £169.50 next year, was great value at roughly £3.26 per week – compared with the cost of other subscriptions.

The chairman asked Michael Pollitt to give the vote of thanks. The meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Next meeting – North Walsham YFC members will be invited as the club's guests to supper on Wednesday, January 10. The speaker, Henry Lamb, who has just won the Young Vet of the Year Award.