



# Newsletter

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF FARMERS



The Livery trip to Nice attracted over 40 members and guests

## 2-3 Meet the new Master and Junior Warden

The new Master, Senior and Junior Warden were formally installed at the harvest festival at St Bart's. Find out what they hope to achieve in the coming years, as well as how they got to where they are.

## 4-5 Surrey Docks Farm and city school visits

Surrey Docks Farm celebrated its Golden Jubilee this year with a reception attended by many Liverymen. The WCF is raising money for the charity, and hosted a farm visit in Bedfordshire.

## 13 Courteenhall Estate hosts Farmers' Livery visit

Courteenhall Estate has been in the Wake family for 350 years, and continues to move with the times. It features a mixed farm with broilers, pigs, a farm shop and renewable energy enterprises.



New Master Jeremy Finnis (centre) with Christopher Day (L) and Stephen Watkins (R)

# Master's Musings

Well, here I am, freshly installed as your Master for the year. May I say firstly what an honour and privilege it is, and I pledge to do my best for you all and for the Livery movement in general during my brief appearance on this wonderful stage.

I should like to thank Richard Crane for his wonderful year. So many great memories and a lot of charitable work achieved under his stewardship. A hard act to follow – but you can be sure that I'll try!

'Who is this Finnis fellow anyway,' I hear you ask. A brief CV follows, if you'll indulge me. After I graduated from University College, Oxford, I worked for ADAS (of fond memory), becoming County Adviser for Hertfordshire in the early 1980s. ADAS provided superb training and experience, with leading farmers as well as some of the best scientific minds in the industry.

We did trials on direct drilling and min-till way back then, too. I was then seconded out of ADAS to pioneer paid-for advice, eventually heading up a company with over 15,000ha under management in Essex.

An opportunity then arose to return to the Civil Service fast stream in Whitehall, where I spent the next six years on a range of policy areas including EU enlargement, border



Jeremy Finnis farms in Essex with his family



L-R: Father Taylor Wilton-Morgan, Revd Geoff Dodgson, Senior Warden Christopher Day M, the Master Jeremy Finnis, Junior Warden Stephen Watkins, the Master's Chaplain Revd Canon Janet Nicholls DL and Clerk Graham Bamford

controls and launching/overseeing the £100m Marketing and Processing Grant Scheme.

The most interesting task was working one-to-one with Minister John Gummer on our 1992 Presidency of the EU, including arranging a 'Suffolk Show' in the grounds of his home for all of the visiting European Ministers.

The attendance of Prince Charles and the then PM John Major made it all logistically interesting. Ironically, my final job in Whitehall was to project manage the privatisation of ADAS.

I have been farming here in Essex in partnership with my wife Diana and family since 1997. Our two sons Toby and Ollie are now in the business, together with recent ABM alumnus James Cole and his mother Sue. The two main farms extend to some 2,500ha and are largely arable, with irrigated potatoes and field vegetables on the better land.

As with most farmers in this area, we have diversified greatly over the past 25 years. This includes a crop storage and haulage business, horse liverys, industrial units, cottage lets, shoots (both game and simulated), a solar farm and 600MW battery/peaking gas power station. I hope many of you will come and have a look round next July during the Summer Visit. The compulsory purchase of some 400ha of our land for the new Lower Thames Crossing

will be well under way by then too. In Scotland we have a small (by Scottish standards) sporting estate, Dell, on the shores of Loch Ness. Here, we have a holiday letting business, shooting, stalking, fishing, forestry and renewables. The latter includes a consented wind farm and a 600MW pumped-storage power station currently in planning.

My Livery 'career' has included chairing the Fellowship Committee, Chairing Farmers and Fletchers Hall Ltd and editing the newsletter, plus of course, my tenure as Junior and Senior Warden. I've enjoyed every minute!

I hope to meet as many of you as possible during my year. They say on our wonderful courses 'you get out of this what you put in', which I guess is true of life in general. But it is also true of the Livery. If you aren't already involved, please do. Think about joining a committee and come to our various functions. It is very rewarding indeed to be able to help to make a positive change for people, whether it's with our courses, at Surrey Docks Farm, helping with school farm visits, presenting college prizes, attending the Oxford Conference with our YFC scholars or supporting youngsters in other ways.

I should like to conclude by saying to you all that my 'door is always open', and you are very welcome - indeed encouraged - to contact me.

# Junior Warden Stephen Watkins

My home is in Worcestershire where I farm as a tenant; I am principally a tenant on the Croome Estate, with a number of other landlords and small area of owned land.

We have a small range of arable crops wholly ours, but a large range of horticultural crops with a number of partners. Diversifications include an Open Equine College (run along the lines of the Open University courses), which is the first one to be established. This centre also has the usual equine activities; we also have the usual storage and small business lets.

I have three children who all live and work in London. Sophie is an architect and married with one son, Otso; Piers works for Vanguard Pensions, and Hugo trained as a forensic accountant but now works for BNP Paribas. He is married with one son, Finlay.

My introduction to the Livery was via an advert in Farmers Weekly in 2000 advertising a course called the Challenge of Rural Leadership. Having just completed a spell as Chairman of the UK arm of the International Agricultural Exchange Association and been involved in work for ADAS in Ukraine and Russia, I thought this would be a good base for any



The installation took place at the wonderful harvest festival in St Bartholemew's Church

future endeavours. As a result of attending the sixth CRL I applied for a Nuffield Scholarship and in 2002 was awarded the 'Alan & Anne Beckett Scholarship' to study: 'Lupins: Niche or alternative crop - are they a viable source of home-produced GM-free protein?'

Following on from my Scholarship Alan Beckett kindly asked me to represent the Becketts at the Nuffield selection, which I still do. I was honoured to chair

the Trust for three years at a period of significant change in 2011-2013.

I like putting back into organisations which have given me an opportunity, so knowing a few Nuffield Scholars who were also members of the Livery, I was clothed in March 2008.

Still being very much involved with Nuffield it was not until 2014 that I started to attend Livery events on a more regular basis.

With a passion for education I was soon on the Education Committee and not long after took on the role of Vice Chairman looking after the ACABM at Cirencester in 2017, at the time of the tragic loss of Liveryman Professor John Alliston.

I joined Court in 2018, which brings a good insight to the issues being dealt with by other committees. I have been fortunate to chair our Education Committee for the past four years, during which we have seen a number of changes to our courses. The introduction of an online application system for both courses is one of the most significant.

Other than my love for my job as a working farmer I have had a private pilot's licence for 51 years and enjoy driving my 1930 Rolls Royce on non-rainy days.

I am really looking forward to serving the Master, Senior Warden and the Company in this coming year.



Stephen Watkins has spent 10 years on the Education Committee, four of them as Chair

# Surrey Docks Farm

**By Jeremy Finnis**

Firstly, may we congratulate Surrey Docks Farm on its Golden Jubilee - what a wonderful milestone!

The Worshipful Company of Farmers was granted its Livery status in 1952 after the magnificent effort of the country's farmers in the second world war. Ancient though farming is, the reason it is not among the older Livery Companies (the oldest being the Weavers, established 1155) is because farming was not practised within the City of London itself. Thus we are 80th in precedence out of the 113 Livery Companies.

**Surrey Docks links**

Our Company first became involved with Surrey Docks Farm back in 1992, when we donated two Gloucester Old Spot pigs, an ark for their accommodation and a supply of feed. That tradition has continued to this day, with a recent donation of calves and piglets, with more calves to come this year.

One of the less glamorous jobs was clearing the muck heap every year, nobly done by Liveryman Edward Hitchcock for many years.

Another element of our support is the assistance we give towards visits by schoolchildren to the farm and to working farms around the capital.



Surrey Docks Farm is located right next to the River Thames, and celebrates its Golden Jubilee this year

There is no substitute for experiencing first-hand the practical work that farmers put in to produce our food.

The fact is that, since the Industrial Revolution, most people live in an urban environment, separated from the land and the food produced from it. The City Farms, and visits to commercial farms, provide a much-needed linkage, re-connecting people with the source of their food.

It is very rewarding, when we host such visits on our own farm in Essex, to see the enthusiasm and genuine

interest shown by pupils and teachers alike. There is something visceral about the land, and the food derived from it, that surfaces on such visits.

Another aspect of our close ties with the farm is the participation in some of the public events of the wider City of London. The annual pancake race in Guildhall Yard is one such. This is a competitive event, where all Masters are required to run a short course, tossing their freshly-made pancakes twice during the circuit. Much hilarity ensues, especially for those brave enough to compete in fancy-dress.

The biggest event of all is of course the Lord Mayor's Show, held in early November. The farm's staff help to man the Company's 'float' and we all enjoy the wonderful reception from the 250,000 people who line the famous route to watch the 7,000-odd participants from all of the Liveries.

Past Master Guy Brogden, the current Master Richard Crane and I have been pleased to run a three-year campaign to give further assistance to Surrey Docks. The work the City Farms do for their communities is of inestimable value, and the extra help we have managed to give should help the farm continue its journey into the future!

We wish the farm, and all the staff and volunteers associated with it, the very best on the occasion of this wonderful milestone.



(L-R) Liveryman Stuart Philpot, Senior Warden Jeremy Finnis, the Master Richard Crane, SDF Manager Gemma Hooper (astride a rocking horse donated to raise money for the charity) and Claire Elson, SDF Assistant Manager.

## City visit to Bedfordshire farm

Over the years The Company has been proud to initiate and support Surrey Docks Farm visits to farms in the Home Counties. This year Farm Manager, Gemma Hooper, led a party of 40 children to visit David, Barbara and son Charles Seabrook's farm at Wilstead near Bedford.

This is a typical family mixed tenanted farm of just under 400 acres plus rented pasture, specialising in sheep and cereal production just to the South of Bedford.

The morning was spent listening to a talk by David on the farm itself and a guided tractor tour to the highest part of the farm, although visibility was disappointingly poor.

After the delicious lunch the visitors were treated to witness the farm's diversification enterprise. David is renowned for his sheep dog training and has built up a handy alternative income doing demonstrations at shows and trials.

In this demonstration he used six dogs and he never had to raise his voice once. Using different languages and whistles



David Seabrook gave a demo of sheep and geese herding for the children, and appeared on Countryfile in the same week

to communicate with the individual dogs including Italian and Spanish, the children were treated to a wonderful display of dog handling, using both sheep and - more unusually - geese.

The dazzling speed and agility of the dogs in response to individual commands kept the children enthralled, as the sheep and geese were manoeuvred into pens and down spectator corridors. It has clearly been a very successful alternative

income to the farm and it even extends to corporate training and team building events.

Some of the questions fielded from the youngsters were unexpected, including which supermarket and fast food restaurants supported British farmers the best?

The visitors returned on their coach to London happy, well fed and much more informed about farming life.

## Royal Cornwall Show reception

In June this year our Livery had the great pleasure of hosting our first drinks reception at the Royal Cornwall Show with the CLA, which is keen to replicate the undoubted success of similar ventures at the Lincolnshire and Royal



Gavin Lane from the CLA welcomed visitors to the show

Norfolk shows. The weather was wild, with plenty of wind and precipitation swirling in from the Atlantic - exactly the sort of elements ideal for growing the wonderful Cornish cauliflowers and broccoli on display!

These had been grown by the Simmons family at Riviera Produce, a leading grower of cauliflower and other vegetables, who supply major retailers from their family farm in Cornwall. Huge thanks to Liveryman Tom Green, who had arranged with the Simmons family for their generous sponsorship of the event.

Liveryman Gavin Lane introduced the event in his role as President-Elect of our hosts, the CLA, and we were fortunate to have also the current CLA President, Victoria Vyvyan, with us for her 'local' county show. Liveryman Peter Greig welcomed guests and Robin Jackson, Director of the Rural Business School and Director of the Challenge of Rural Leadership course, spoke passionately

about the course and its purpose to inspire the next generation of leaders and managers in our sector.

Tom Simmons (ABM '21 & BGP '23), Managing Director at Riviera Produce, emphasised how crucial it is for rural businesses to have a skilled and dynamic workforce, explaining there are many diverse opportunities for well trained, competent staff in the South West.

Guests were entertained by Ellie the robot dog, developed by Robotriks at the University of Plymouth, co-designed in collaboration with farmers, and currently being tested on farms to analyse soils and biodiversity. Jake Gibson Shaw-Sutton of Robotriks gave a lively demonstration of Ellie's skills!

A raffle for a hamper of speciality Cornish Produce was held to raise money for The Addington Fund. This successful inaugural event at our westernmost county show suggests the Royal Cornwall Show could become a fixture in our Livery calendar.

# PX Farms open day

June proved to be an even busier month than usual for Liveryman James Peck, owner of the impressive PX Farms business which he has built up over the past 25 years.

For the whole of June, James hosted German drill giant Horsch, which flew in leading farmers from around the world to look at the full Horsch range of equipment in action on James's Cambridgeshire soils. James was able to give this ample coverage on his popular YouTube channel.

James also generously hosted a visit arranged by Chairman of the Farmers' Club, PM Karen Mercer, which was a stunning success with over 120 accepting the invitation; the date coincided with a visit from a group of American farmers and all were ably entertained.

Most arable farmers would surely head for the beach as part of their rotation after such a demanding schedule, but the next day was the inaugural open day for PX Farms. As James' avid followers will know he does not do anything by half measure, as he had nearly 10,000 visitors through the gate for the conference, farm tours, trade stands and demonstrations.

The conference in his new 'shed of dreams' attracted a sell-out 2,000 people to listen to key note speakers. These included Michael Horsch, who has influenced James so much throughout his short period of rapid growth; Western Australian farmer



James Peck's open day attracted nearly 10,000 people

David Cox, who farms a meagre 65,000 acres; Founder of Oxbury Bank Nick Evans, and a panel session from the great and the good within the UK agricultural industry.

However, the biggest round of applause was reserved for James himself, who got a standing ovation from an audience that clearly appreciates what he has done and is doing for our great UK business of agriculture.

After lunch, the trade stands sprang to life, busily hosting the remaining visitors who arrived to see the demonstrations and tour the PX farmyard. The farmyard contains 180,000 tonnes of storage, an accredited lab, 12 immaculate Volvo lorries and other modern machinery to cope efficiently with the 12,500 acres farmed.

James stated that his aim was to double that and own a 3,000-acre ring-fenced estate - even in his late 40's he is still setting himself demanding targets.

The focus of the day was also to raise money for three farming charities, including RABI, Nuffield Scholarships and the Worshipful Company of Farmers.

On the day, Liverymen Nick Major and Bill Young attended with Assistant Clerk Duncan Couper to represent

the Livery Company and take enquiries from visitors on the two flagship courses it runs. It proved worthwhile as they had numerous enquiries and the day raised well over £12,000 for the three chosen charities.

That night James hosted a party in his garden for all those who had contributed to the success of the event, not least his mother Helen who had managed much of the private catering behind the scenes. All in all a huge success and one that will surely be repeated. With all the cleaning up completed, the four PX Farms giant Claas combines sprang into life on his winter barley. Just a normal June for PX farms and its staff!



Visitors were treated to lunch and a large conference (right)

# Thatchers Cider

## By Chris Behagg

After 20 minutes in the company of Martin Thatcher it is quite clear that he should be in charge of all UK education. His simple, no-nonsense approach to education, coupled with his company's excellent support of apprenticeships would make him the ideal candidate.

Thatchers' apprenticeships give its recipients a thorough grounding in all things associated with cider and it's marketing, but also, so much more. These range from team building with rugby clubs, to taking part in accountant and lawyer meetings. Students also learn about topics ranging from domestic budgeting to understanding how mortgages work, and from learning about public speaking to making presentations to the board.

Any apprentice who does not become part of the company's impressive employment retention rate will leave Thatchers, after their 18-month or two-year apprenticeship, with confidence and all-round life skills that are largely missing from the school curriculum. This year Martin received over 300 applications for six places.

The 251 members of staff are important to Thatchers, but on visiting the factory you're hard pressed to find any of them! Some 30,000 cans an hour of Thatchers Gold fly past as you enter the canning plant. They are filled, packed, palletised and moved on to the warehouse with no more than a couple of people monitoring screens.

The pallet of canned cider is soon joined by a pallet of kegs which have



Five generations on, Thatchers continues to blend tradition, innovation and opportunity.

been filled nearby, also heading to store. At the same time, you then see pallets of empty kegs and cans being conveyed in the opposite direction, towards the filling lines.

The warehouse is an impressive building and much thought has been given to reduce the exterior impact on the surrounding village. But internally, the investment in automation is at another level.

Pallets are automatically placed on warehouse shelves but mixed, so not all product is in one place. This means that when a lorry load of a particular product is called upon, the numerous picking machines do not get bunched up, and efficiency increases.

Martin and Eleanor Thatcher gave us so much of their time. We learnt that this five-generation business started in 1902 when Martin's great grandfather

swapped coffin making and undertaking for farming. Cider making was a part of the business from the beginning. Now there are over 100 million litres of cider made annually with 650 acres of apple growing, but no farming.

Focusing on core products and not spreading your management and resources too thinly is very much part of the family's thinking, particularly following Martin's Nuffield Scholarship in 2005. Building the brand, keeping things simple and not being frightened to follow your gut instinct have played a key part in the immense growth of this business over the last 20 years.

This was particularly true when Covid hit, and all the pub trade vanished. Within days the business decided to cease all keg production and transfer that volume to cans and bottles. This ability to assess the situation, take a risk and quickly implement a plan soon paid dividends as retail demand soared.

Having toured the factory, chief cider maker, Richard, gave us an opportunity to taste various ciders, explaining how the different apple varieties' characteristics create different ciders.

Being proud of what you do is very much part of this family business's principles. This manifests itself in the incredible tidiness throughout the factory and no less so in the manicured landscaped areas on the 11 acre site. Even the untidy areas were immaculate! I heartily thank the family on behalf of everyone present on the day.



Martin Thatcher explained how his great grandfather started the business in 1902, swapping coffin making for farming. Now the business is highly automated, producing 100 million litres of cider annually.

## Education update

### By Stephen Watkins

I am pleased to report that our education portfolio has had another very successful year. The 73rd Agricultural Business Management course last November was the first year we ran it 'in-house' with the directors; Keith Barriball and Karen Brosnan, with Elizabeth Badger, and Assistant Clerk Duncan Couper looking after the administration.

The 74th Agricultural Business Management course, scheduled for November 2026, will introduce several changes. Formerly known as the 'Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management' (ACABM), the course's name has been shortened to 'Agricultural Business Management' (ABM). We have two other changes to the ABM; Elizabeth has returned to Ireland now that she is no longer with the Royal Agricultural University, so we welcome Terri Lucas to the team. The most significant change is probably the



Delegates on the WCF's education courses often go on to play important roles in the industry

change in course location to Stonehouse Court Hotel, in Stonehouse near Stroud, Gloucestershire.

The applications for the 74th course were significantly up on previous years, which resulted in three hard days of interviewing at the Hall and a number on Zoom a few days before. We have selected a very strong cohort of 22 and have offered several places for the 75th course.

The recent interviews for the Challenge of Rural Leadership (CRL) course saw 20 accepted for the 28th course in January 2026.

The interview process for both our courses now includes a past delegate on the selection panel and another past delegate with the meet and greet team, and I am pleased to report this has worked very well.

Applications for this 28th course were not quite as numerous this time, so I think we need to take some of the extra promotion introduced to the ABM and apply it to the CRL.

There are three courses we continue support at Cranfield; the two MBAs and Business Growth Programme, which are proving very popular, meaning we may have to look at the way we fund these courses as we are over-subscribed at present.

As I retire from the Education Committee after 10 years; four as Chairman, may I thank all those who have been on this fabulous journey with me and wish my successors all the best going forward.

## Nuffield Report

Jamie Stokes has published his Nuffield Scholarship report entitled: 'Doing more with less - learning from the small to teach the big'. Jamie's Scholarship was sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Farmers with Savills.

The objective of Jamie's study tour was to look at what can be learned from small-scale business and producers, including but not limited to urban agriculture, from the perspective of a UK high efficiency large-scale arable farmer.

The key messages were as follows:

- Doing more with less isn't just technical thinking, it is also philosophical and cultural.
- The answer to the problem of small-space farming is more mindset than methods.
- There are better platforms for communication about agriculture.
- Agriculture must look outward.
- Ask better questions.

Jamie, who farms in Cambridgeshire, will be presenting his report at the Nuffield Farming Conference to be held in Aberdeen in November.



Jamie Stokes farms in Cambridgeshire

**Jamie's full report** can be downloaded here: <https://cutt.ly/Dtew6Yia>

# Installation of the new Master

**By David Bolton**

October 2025 and another harvest festival celebration in the beauty of St Bartholomew's church, with a congregation of Liverymen with their families and friends.

Being London's oldest church, it has seen over 900 harvests – though only one harvest service as yet by Fr Taylor Wilton-Morgan. Despite this year's disappointing harvest, allied to desultory prices, the Company's voices rang out strongly and positively, while John Rutter's 'Look at the World', sung by the choir, has seldom sounded so good.

I remembered to look up to the Oriel window which was provided by Prior William Bolton (spelt correctly but no relation) around 1505. This gave him a view of the High Altar and the tomb of Rahere, founder of the Priory. Prior Bolton also put in a door from the church to his lodgings – anticipating more volatile seasons to come perhaps?

Geoff Dodgson (Wye College 1970-1973), the retiring Master's Chaplain, provided a high quality and very relevant



The choir at St Bartholomew's church provided a wonderful atmosphere at the new Master's installation

sermon. Clerk Graham Bamford with Assistant Clerk Duncan Couper ably managed the shuffling of robes, and Messrs Finnis, Day and Watkins were blessed as Master, Senior and Junior Wardens respectively at the altar rail by the Rev Canon Janet Nicholls DL.

After the service the whole congregation retreated to Haberdashers' Hall where 186 people enjoyed drinks before sitting down to enjoy a first-class Grayson lunch with

good fellowship, wines and speeches until well into the afternoon.

The outgoing and incoming Masters rivalled each other's tales of wit and brevity, offering sincere thanks to very many involved in the success of the Company today.

The original Clumber Farm Cart performed well, supplemented with swipe cards, modest churns and a spittoon, to add over £2,000 to Company funds.

## Common Hall

On Monday 2 June the Court hosted the first virtual Common Hall, with Liverymen able to take part by joining virtually as well as having the usual option to attend



The first mixed Common Hall was a success

in person. It was a stunning success and the IT part worked seamlessly thanks to the diligence and skills of our Assistant Clerk Duncan Couper.

The hour-long presentation included pieces from the Master and two Wardens along with short and sharp pieces from the three Committee Chairs, as well as words of wisdom from influential past masters Rosie Carne, Julian Sayers and Philip Wynn.

We also heard about Military Affiliations from Anne Courtney and a brief on funding from Robert Sears and Tom Green DL.

The format also allowed questions from the virtual floor as to the running of and choices made by the Farmers Livery Company. Topics ranged from how future Masters are chosen to the charities supported and general finance.

It is a new format that is sure to be repeated next year.

## Harvest Festival

The 12th National Harvest Service was held in Westminster Abbey on 16 October, in the presence of HM Queen Camilla. A wonderful display of produce greeted the congregation as they filed in and they enjoyed readings by Charles Dance and Matt Baker.

Coupled with young farmers and volunteers, plus stirring anthems and traditional hymns, the occasion made for a moving ceremony. The Abbey was packed with the great and good of the food and farming industries, who had come together to celebrate this pivotal part of the farming calendar.



# Connecting primary producers

**By Caroline Rhodes**

As agriculture across the world grapples with the challenges of climate change, food security and the transition toward net zero, leadership and collaboration have never been more important.

These are issues that transcend borders — and they demand that those of us working in agriculture engage internationally, learn from each other, and help shape the future together.

That’s why I am deeply honoured to be travelling from Australia in January to take part in the Challenge of Rural Leadership Course (CRL) — an extraordinary opportunity made possible through the generous support of the Worshipful Company of Farmers.

As Chief Executive Officer of Primary Producers SA (PPSA) — the peak body representing South Australian farmers — my role is to advocate for the state’s primary industries, ensuring they are valued and supported by government, policymakers and the wider community.

Our members produce much of the food, fibre and wine that Australia is known for globally, and like farmers everywhere, they face growing expectations to play a central role in delivering emissions reductions and supporting environmental goals, while continuing to produce sustainably and profitably.

**Balancing objectives**

Balancing those objectives is one of the defining challenges of our time. Farmers understand the realities of a changing climate and are already investing in innovation and adaptation. But as nations increase their environmental ambition, we must ensure that practical realities are not lost — that agricultural production, food security, and the social fabric of rural communities remain central to the transition toward a low-carbon future.

The Challenge of Rural Leadership Course offers a unique opportunity to explore these issues in depth, surrounded by peers who share a commitment to leading with authenticity and purpose. I’m particularly interested in the course’s focus on communication, strategic decision-making, and resilience — qualities that are essential



Caroline Rhodes is flying in from Australia to take part in the CRL course, Oxford Farming Conference and LAMMA

for effective advocacy and collaboration between agriculture, government and society.

While in the UK, I’m also delighted to be participating as a panellist at the Low Carbon Agriculture Show, held alongside LAMMA and CropTec, where I’ll join a discussion entitled: ‘How can we make regenerative farming profitable?’ This will be chaired by Rebecca Pow, former Environment Minister. Alongside Baroness Minette Batters and John Cherry, I’ll be contributing an Australian perspective on the policy and practical measures that support sustainable farming systems.

This opportunity to engage with UK farm leaders on issues of shared importance — from regenerative agriculture and soil health to

emissions reduction and profitability — complements the goals of the CRL course perfectly. Both experiences reflect a shared belief that the future of farming depends on informed, confident and connected leadership.

I am immensely grateful to the WCF for making my participation in the CRL course possible. Their investment in developing leaders across the global rural sector is both visionary and deeply appreciated.

I’m looking forward to learning from others, sharing Australia’s story, and returning home with fresh insights and stronger connections — because the challenges we face in farming are shared, and so too are the opportunities to lead with purpose toward a more sustainable future.



The Challenge of Rural Leadership course has a focus on communication, strategy, and resilience

# Holt's help to raise funds

Liveryman and Court member Tom Green consigned the first shotgun to be sold in aid of the Worshipful Company of Farmers' chosen charity, Surrey Docks City Farm.

Tom dropped one of his less used shotguns into Holt's Cornwall valuation day to be entered into its summer auction, with the whole hammer price of his gun donated to the WCF direct through Holt's Charitable and Legacy Lots Programme

Holt's Auctioneers; the country's leading auctioneers of fine modern and antique guns and keen supporters of the WCF, use this initiative to help us support the Surrey Docks Farm.

Holt's can assist you when the time comes to retire your guns, or perhaps if you're just looking to make some more room in the cabinet and would like Surrey Docks Farm to benefit from the proceeds.

Through its Charitable and Legacy Lots Programme the Holt's team of highly experienced staff will handle the collection and sale of your guns and related items without charging any seller's fees, and are also happy to advise on leaving the value of a gun in your Will.

## Charity lots

Regular valuation days are held throughout the UK, where you can bring items to be valued and consigned. These



Tom Green (R) is the first to have donated the proceeds of his gun to Surrey Docks Farm

are hosted by experienced members of the Holt's team, who will tell you something about the item you have brought along.

They are always keen to hear of family or related provenance; it is often of interest and can have a highly beneficial impact on the value. They will then suggest a realistic catalogue estimate and reserve (if you are minded to sell), together with a likely hammer price.

## Legacy lots

As a supporter of the WCF's charity initiatives, Holt's will advise you on how to bequeath the value of your guns to the

Trust and will advise on the procedure that executors should follow when the time comes, including licencing and, if necessary, working with the Police.

Holt's very kindly do not charge any sellers' fees for items donated to support Surrey Docks Farm via its Charity and Legacy Lots Programme, and will pay the sale proceeds directly to the Trust, on your behalf.

For more information, please visit [www.holtsauctioneers.com/legacy.asp](http://www.holtsauctioneers.com/legacy.asp), or alternatively get in contact with David Thurgood by calling 01297 306123 or emailing [westcountry@holtsauctioneers.com](mailto:westcountry@holtsauctioneers.com).

## Legacy 2025

2025 has been a difficult year for a number of reasons, but the Budget in the autumn of 2024 has added extra pressures on businesses.

I am sure many of you will have been speaking to your financial advisers and accountants for advice on the best way to plan for the future.

When you have provided for those closest to you, a charitable gift in the form of a legacy to the Farmers Company is an excellent way to help it carry out its educational and charity work.

They are an important source of income and all legacies large or small are much appreciated.

Most charitable gifts are free of inheritance tax and there are several ways that a legacy can be made, so please consider the Company when making your arrangements and ensure your memory lives on with the Company that we all value so highly.

If you require any information please contact Hugh Wykes, by emailing [hugh@wykeslodge.co.uk](mailto:hugh@wykeslodge.co.uk) or phone on 07831 186471.

Legacies are an important source of income for the WCF's charitable aims, says Liveryman Hugh Wykes



# Nice trip

**By Jeremy Finnis**

In September our Clerk Graham, assisted by Steph Delizo of travel agent Windows on the Wild, put together a fabulous programme for nearly 40 Liverymen and guests. We were treated to temperatures of around 30C, with wall-to-wall sunshine for the full four days of the visit.

Day 1: We arrived at Nice airport and met the incomparable Frederick, our guide for the week. It was a short hop along the fabled Promenade des Anglais to our hotel on the seafront, and with a quick freshen up we set out on foot to an unusual and amusing wine tasting.

Our host at the Cave Bianchi was certainly a showman, with some hilarious homespun philosophy, likening the fragility of life to a bottle of good wine – born into green youth, developing to perfection and then fading away. His advice was to drink life to the full when it is at its best – wait too long and it will be others drinking that wine in your memory!

Over dinner the Clerk distributed his bespoke livery ‘pillow mist’ spray – a fragrant aid to sleep. It was certainly fragrant.

Day 2: Started with a packed sight-seeing tour of Monaco, culminating with a superb – and gargantuan – lunch at the Café de Paris in Casino Square. On the way back to the hotel we took in the medieval village of Eze, breathtakingly



The Livery's September tour to the Côte d'Azur took in some stunning views of the French Riviera

perched on cliffs above the French Riviera with spectacular views over the Med. It brought back happy memories for your author, as he was a guest here during the 1981 Monaco Grand Prix, working in his holidays as a lorry driver for the Williams team!

Day 3: We took in another stunning hilltop village – St Paul de Vence, the resting place of artist Marc Chagall. The beautiful shops in the village proved too tempting for several of us and we succumbed to various delights including nougat and foie gras.

Day 4: Final day visits included the harbour and market at Antibes. The harbour was packed with the yachts of the rich and famous – one being that

of the Bahraini royal family. A snip at \$250m. The smells and sounds of the fresh produce market captured the essence of French foodiness.

The day concluded with another wine tasting after a trip round the Cremat winery. Some of us then headed to the famous Negresco Hotel in Nice to sample its artistic and liquid delights.

The week also saw the celebration of Christopher and Sasha French's 59th wedding anniversary as well as Tony and Helen Strawson's 10th. The tour party enjoyed four days of wonderful fellowship, part of the very essence of Livery life. Happy days. Our thanks to the Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Steph for an unforgettable experience.

# Royal awards

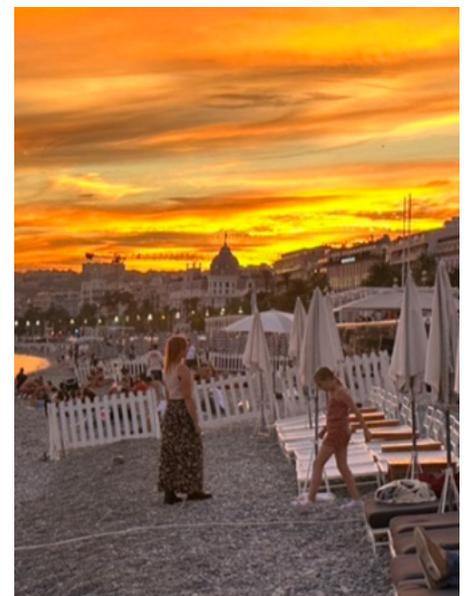
We are pleased to announce that two of our Company have received awards from the King.

Julian Sayers DL (PM 2017-2018) was awarded an MBE for 'Services to Agriculture' and the Prince of Wales presented his award at Windsor Castle.

Our Honorary Freeman Liz Green DL received an OBE for 'Voluntary Services' and was presented with her award by the King, also at Windsor.



Right: Julian Sayers collecting his MBE



A spectacular French sunset

# Courteenhall visit

Our fascinating visit to Courteenhall Estate was led by Dr Johnny Wake, who is a farmer with a difference. A qualified doctor by profession, he abandoned his medical career to return to Courteenhall, the estate which has been in the family for some 350 years.

He is now the Managing Partner of this beautiful ancestral home and estate. With a wry smile, he told us that his great grandfather's quote of 'don't mess it up' is almost constantly ringing in his ears.

Far from messing it up or even just maintaining the status quo, Johnny has been a catalyst for positive change. With the estate strategically situated close to the M1 on the outskirts of rapidly expanding Northampton, Johnny has capitalised on its natural geographical advantages. He has been able to reinvest by acquiring two outlying sister farms in Norfolk and a further 300 acres in nearby Salcey Forest.

However it was Johnny's passion for regenerative farming which came over loud and clear when the Worshipful Company visited. With his young and go-ahead Farms Director Rosie Davis, he has a clear vision as to where the farm is going. They have gone heavily into Higher Tier stewardship and have some spectacular red clover AB15 mixes, accounting for 62% of the farm. The soils are well cared for, friable and high in organic matter as they benefit from the estate-funded 35,000 broiler unit which gives high value muck.

The farm looked in very good shape, with 65 pedigree Herefords roaming in the parkland in front of the Hall giving it the feeling of the bucolic idyll of former centuries. A new farm shop is set to open



Dr Johnny Wake led a fascinating tour of his family's Courteenhall Estate

shortly to sell all the produce the estate can produce - the ambition is clear. They even had Berkshire pigs roaming in carefully fenced areas, and there are plans to sell the bounteous supply of home-produced venison in their own brand sausages.

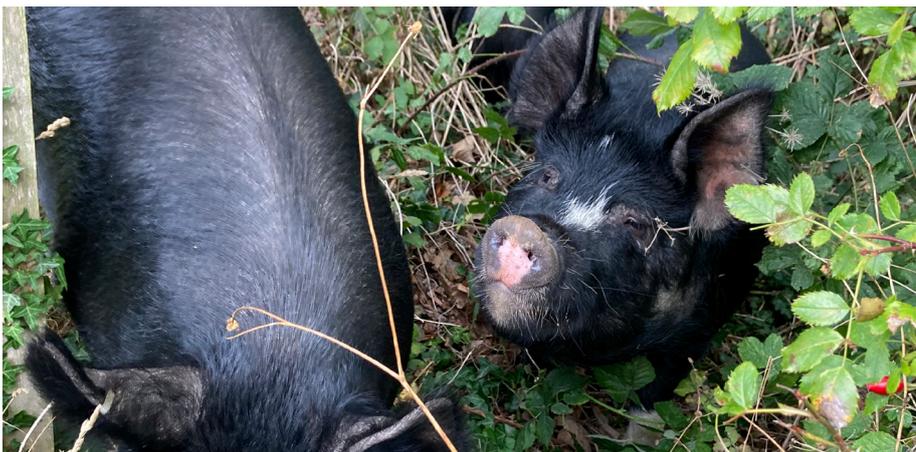
The new shop will increase the estate staff from 11 to 29, but Johnny and Rosie seem undeterred by the investment and have great plans for expansion as opportunities become apparent. Nearing completion is the externally-funded state-of-the-art anaerobic digester plant which will utilise all the chicken manure and provide valuable digestate for the arable business.

Currently using outside contractors on the arable operation, all the grain goes straight to Camgrain. This has allowed greater letting income potential from renovated and new buildings for appreciative nearby businesses.

Renewable energy is a feature that fits in with the estate's policy, with solar battery, wind and biomass power all used to great effect to produce green energy and reduce outside dependency.

Coffee and a delicious lunch were served in the magnificent front hall and dining room, which are reminiscent of the National Gallery.

On his last official visit our outgoing Master Richard Crane gave an eloquent thank you to the Wake family for a wonderfully informal, yet informative tour. In an example of pure one upmanship our new Junior Warden Stephen Watkins flew back to his Worcestershire farm from a nearby landing strip and was home well before most of us had reached the M1!



Above and left: The farm has 35,000 broilers and free-range Berkshire pigs, which sell through the farm shop

# The Master crashed at Wing Field Day

Our Military Affiliation with the Air Cadets saw the Master Richard Crane and Court Assistant Anne Courtney attend their annual Wing Field Day at RAF Northolt on Saturday 28 June 2025. We were shown round by Sq. Leader Helen Greaves, herself once a Cadet and now working full time for the MOD in Whitehall. She gives up her spare time to volunteer as an Officer for the Wing.

Some 23 Squadrons were represented by 300 Cadets, a smaller number than usual due to many Cadets away revising for national school exams. However, the Master had a very enjoyable day and saw drill displays including continuity drills (foot drills to music) and the marching band competition, as well as the various Squadron Musical Ensemble performances.

Helen explained the intricacies and timing involved in the training of the drills, none of which come without a great number of hours of practice put in by the Cadets.

The Master had a chance to 'fly' in a flight simulator and we have to report that, having carried out a number of intricate manoeuvres, he lost concentration for a moment and 'crashed' the aircraft! He also had an opportunity to take part in the new activity of 'e-sport' - which is essentially gaming using hand/eye co-ordination and much more.



The Master 'flying' in a flight simulator - which he later crashed

The Cadets learn tactical, military and leadership skills all within a team scenario on a laptop console. No doubt this will be a skill required now and in the future for our modern military defence.

to travel but also a chance to spend two weeks with Air Cadets from all over the world, and see how their Air Forces operate compared to ours.

Having only been a Cadet for four years, she is the first Cadet in 22 years to be awarded the 'Station'. This Commander's Cadet Award gives her many opportunities to participate in events at Northolt with the serving Air Personnel. Her advice to any Cadet is to 'stick with it' - you get much more out than you put in.

As a post script: part of this Government's new defence review is to increase the Combined Cadet Force by 30%. It will be interesting to see if this is achieved.



Helen Greave (L) and Isoblle Wong (R)



Presenting the John Thorpe Salver to 85 Enfield Squadron

The Master then presented the two Livery trophies: The John Thorpe Salver for the Squadron which has contributed most to community service throughout the year. It was awarded to 85 Enfield Squadron. The new John Thorpe Salver for the Squadron that has been outstanding in outdoor pursuits was awarded to 1083 Uxbridge Squadron.

We also met Cadet Warrant Officer Isobelle Wong who is going to the USA with the International Air Cadet Exchange. The Livery is financially supporting Isobelle and she explained that it is not only an amazing opportunity



The new John Thorpe Salver to 1083 Uxbridge Squadron

## Charity Golf Day

Another successful charity golf day at Denham golf club took place on September 9 and we were blessed with excellent weather, so there could be no excuses on the course.

The event managed to put together 14 wonderful teams and we would love get it to 18 teams for next year. Ideas anyone?

The date for your diary next year is Tuesday 8 September, again kindly hosted by Denham Golf Club.

Our thanks to everyone who took part in this spirited day which showed it's all about the fun of taking part. The eventual winners were Rob Rand and his team, and we look forward to welcoming Rob as a Liveryman in due course.

We raised the sum of £25,000, which is a meritorious achievement, and I would like to thank the Master and Senior Warden for attending the day, especially considering neither of them are golfers. And finally, what a good lunch!



L-R: Robert Greenwood, Robert Rand, Robert Sears, Ralph Parker, James Pocklington.

## Rocking horse raffle



The draw for this beautiful, individually made rocking horse crafted by Stevenson Bros will take place on December 9 at our Christmas Lunch.

All proceeds will be going to support Surrey Docks Farm, which we have supported for 30 years, in order that it can continue to do its rewarding work to bring an awareness of farming, food, agriculture and horticulture to those who have no exposure to it.

Anyone who hasn't yet bought a raffle ticket can purchase them for £50 via the QR code.



## New apprenticeships

The WCF's two newly admitted apprentices were present at the October Court and Installation Luncheon, at which they were able to meet Past Master Richard Brooks, whose family set up the fund. Oliver Christian-Allan was apprenticed to Liveryman Jane Gurney MBE in June and Rufus Thompson was apprenticed to Liveryman Erica Bargman at the October Court Meeting.

Our apprentices are able to join us due to the Attfield Brooks Apprentice Fund, which was set up in 1989 to assist Company apprentices between the ages of 18 and 26 to 'learn the art and science of agriculture'.

To find out more about the scheme please contact the Clerk.



L-R: Erica Bargman, Fiona Thompson, Rufus Thompson, Richard Brooks, Oliver Christian-Allan and Jane Gurney MBE

# Announcements

## Court on June 3: New Freeman

Mr Thomas Albert Heylen  
Mr John Peter Hull  
Mr Martin Thomas Lines  
Mr Robert Mark Strawson

Andrew Stuart Jackson  
Ailsa Kiely  
Robert David Rand  
Brian Richardson  
David James Slack

Kenneth Roy Young of Highfield Road, Congleton, who died on August 20 2025. He was a Yeoman and was Clothed on September 17 1984

## Clothing and apprenticeship

Freeman Mrs Claudine Church was Clothed into the Livery  
Oliver Christian-Allan was apprenticed to Liveryman Jane Gurney MBE

## Clothing and apprenticeship

Freeman Nicholas John Hunt was Clothed into the Livery  
Rufus Samson Thompson was apprenticed to Liveryman Erica Bargman

Mr Peter Neal Patterson of Knighton Road, Leicester, who died on August 15 2025 He was admitted as a Freeman of the Company on October 10 2023

## Court on October 14: New Freeman

Nick Allpress  
Paul Frank Arden  
Beverly Joan Dixon  
Giles Alexander Lee Dobson  
Michael John Alexander Fiddes  
William Richard Harrison

## It is with sadness and regret that we announce the deaths of the following:

Charles William Antrobus of Shustoke, Coleshill, who died on August 31 2025. He was Clothed on March 11 2008

Mr Graham Arthur Jackman of Small Dole, West Sussex, who died on June 14 2025. He was Clothed on April 7 1997.

Mr David Christopher Browning of Paddock Wood, Kent, who died on April 30 2025. He was Clothed on September 17 1984

# Events

## Events for your diaries in 2025 and 2026

9-22 November - 74th Agricultural Business Management, Glos  
25-26 November - WCFA Learning Extension Days, Loughborough  
27 November - Past Masters' Meeting & Luncheon, London  
9 December - Christmas Court & Livery Luncheon, Grocers' Hall  
16 December - Inter-Livery Nine Carols & Lessons, St Bartholomew's  
16 December - Christmas Dinner, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall  
7-9 January 2026 - Oxford Farming Conference, Oxford  
14-16 January - Inter-Livery Skiing, Mayrhofen, Austria  
18-31 January - 29th Challenge of Rural Leadership, Devon  
3 February - Annual Banquet, Drapers' Hall  
17 February - Inter-Livery Pancake Races, Guildhall Yard  
23 February - City Food & Drink Lecture, Guildhall  
3 March - March Court & Livery Luncheon, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall  
20 March - United Guilds' Service, St Paul's Cathedral  
25-29 March - Trip to Malta  
1 April - Clerk's 'Bin End' Dinner, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall  
21 April - Agricultural Lecture & Dinner, Plaisterers' Hall  
27-28 May - Suffolk Show  
1 June - Common Hall - online, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall  
1 June - Court & Past Masters' Dinner, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall  
2 June - Election Court & Livery Luncheon, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall  
15 June - Familiarisation Day, Farmers & Fletchers' Hall

17 June - WCF/CLA Reception, Lincolnshire Show  
24 June - Election of the Sheriffs  
7-9 July - Master's Summer Outing, Essex  
8 September - Charity Golf Day, Denham Golf Club  
14 September - Masters & Clerks' Luncheon  
29 September - Election of the Lord Mayor  
13 October - Installation Court, Harvest Festival service & Court Luncheon, Haberdashers'  
2 November - Garden of Remembrance, St Paul's Cathedral (M&C only)  
3 November - Lincolnshire Dinner  
8-21 November - 75th Agricultural Business Management, Stonehouse Court, Gloucestershire  
13 November - Silent Ceremony, Guildhall  
14 November - Lord Mayor's Show, City of London  
24-25 November - WCFA Learning Extension Days, Loughborough University

To view events on the Farmers' Livery website, please scan this QR code:

