

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY
MINUTES OF MEETING 06th NOVEMBER 2013

MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

Ray Franklin Chairman	Chris Bush	Mike Rea
Paul Salvidge	Heather Salvidge	Kevin Wood
Valerie Austin	Carol Wylde	Margaret Rea
Avril Braidwood	Janet Tulley	Brian Tulley
Dennis Haslam	John Segar	Caryl Benner
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Dorothy Dorman
Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston	Lisa Dunbar
Jean Platt		

Apologies:

Gordon Barker	David Verlander	Ian & Moyra Jackson
Gordon & Ruth Fulton	Sue Johnson	Colin Smith
Jan Westcott	Andy Elliott	Tim Snow

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present as well as Mr & Mrs Steve Schorah, our guest speakers for the evening.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting 11th September 2013**

There were no amendments to the previous meeting's minutes.

3. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

4. **Guest Speakers – Pat & Steve Schorah**

Our speakers for the evening gave a very entertaining and informative, not to say personal account of the Dunmow Flitch Trials having won the Flitch in 2012.

The trials date back at least 900 years to the time when William the Conqueror rewarded his Knights with land and Ralph Baynard was made Lord of the Manor of Little Dunmow. His sister Jauga founded the Priory there in 1104 when the Bishop of London consecrated it. Tradition has it that Ralph and Jauga were so worried that Christian marriage was under threat that Jauga offered a Flitch of Bacon to any

couple that could prove they had been married for at least a year and a day in harmony.

By the late 1300s, traveller's tales made the tradition well known around the country and reference was made to the Trials in William Langland's *The Vision of Piers Ploughman* and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's* tale from his *Pilgrims Progress*. By the 1500s the then Lord of the Manor did not see the Trials as an important custom despite its by then 650 year history and decided to lock the gates of the Priory so claimants were unable to enter to claim their Flitch. Following this, it was not until 1751 that John Shankshaft of Wethersfield and his wife Anne were successfully awarded the Flitch.

In 1854, Harrington Ainsworth wrote his novel, *The Custom of Dunmow* and such was its popularity that he was invited to be the Judge in the 1855 Trials which were attended by some 5000 people and extensively covered in the *Illustrated London News*.

From 1890 a committee was formed to manage the Trials and the Jury reinstated made up of six spinsters and six bachelors from Great Dunmow. The trials continued to be held albeit disrupted by both World Wars and since 1966 have been held every Leap Year. Couples awarded the Flitch were required to take an oath kneeling on "pointed stones" before being carried aloft through the Town in the Flitch chair.

Not every couple were successful in claiming their prize, and on one notable occasion, the successful couple had the flitch taken away after they started arguing because their bag was too small to take home the bacon!

5. Open Forum and Any Other Business

5.1 Memorial Chapel

Mike Rea said that although things had apparently been quiet on this front, attention has turned to the next steps in the building restoration. To facilitate this, the Parish Council has instigated a Cemetery Working Group on which the Society has a representative. As well as the Chapel, the group will be looking at all aspects of the Cemetery and its management and is currently formulating ideas how the building may become a useful resource to the benefit of the Village.

5.2 War Memorial

Gordon Fulton has advised that the majority of the stories have been completed and the rest are well advanced such that they will be complete by the New Year ready for proof-reading

5.4 Website

As mentioned in the quarterly report, development of our own website is taking place. The content has been loaded into a development site which is now being refined. If all goes well, the site should be active in the New Year. Much time has been spent researching copyright rules for various bits of content e.g. maps and photographs and understanding how they affect us.

6. Dates of Next Meetings

The next meetings of the Society will be held as follows:

Wednesday 5th March 2014 – AGM and Derek Winter speaking about the History of Stansted Airport

Wednesday 11th June 2014 – Ms Sarah Doig will give a talk entitled “There’s No Such Thing as a Good Tax!” a look at taxation through the ages.

ENDS