

# ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY

## MINUTES OF MEETING 12<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2019

### MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

#### Those Present:

|                          |                |                 |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Ray Franklin<br>Chairman | Paul Salvidge  | David Verlander |
| Heather Salvidge         | Mike Rea       | Chris Bush      |
| Lynda Jolly              | Margaret Rea   | Diane Bush      |
| Nina Gaubert             | Tim Snow       | Vic Dowsett     |
| Kevin Wood               | Trevor Hackett | Nigel Lusby     |
| Brenda Davidson          | Lynda Bowcock  | Caryl Benner    |
| Jean Platt               | Gill Hathaway  | Tony Eatson     |
| Ian Jackson              | Moyra Jackson  | Frances Lambert |
| Roger Clark              | Phyllis Clark  | Tricia Holyomes |
| Sue Beeston              | Trevor Hunt    | Jill Hunt       |
| Christine Hall           | Ian Beeston    | Anne Player     |
| Graham Morland           | Valerie Austin | Brian Tulley    |
| Carol Wylde              | Jill French    | Helen Mudge     |

#### Apologies:

|                  |                |               |
|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Roger Kendrick   | Sue Johnson    | Peter Johnson |
| Tony Bailey      | Jackie Bailey  | Therese Clear |
| Peter Clear      | Colin Smith    | Jean Beeston  |
| Keith Merrifield | Pam Merrifield |               |

We are sad to report that Jean Reay passed away peacefully in her sleep this morning. Jean it was, you may recall, who donated the 8mm film of life on Ugley Hall Farm in the 1950's, a wonderful record of local farming life in the post war years. Our condolences go to her family.

We welcome Frances Lambert as a returning member.

It was noted that Nina Gaubert has joined the committee and attended her first meeting.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present and Mr Lee Player, our guest speaker for the evening.

#### 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

### 3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 4. Guest Speaker Mr Lee Player

The Chairman introduced our speaker for the evening, Mr Lee Player, Master Thatcher. Lee would talk later about the actual practice of thatching but Ray Franklin started the evening by introducing the history of thatching. Once early man had left his cave behind, it is thought that he moved on to live in early versions of the Round House and surviving archaeological evidence suggests that these would have been thatched. In the 1970's the Danbury Hill Fort was unearthed in Hampshire and extensively excavated. Dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was in use for some 500 years over which time it was successively re-modelled becoming more complex and resulting in it becoming a developed hill fort. From the evidence it is clear that many of the buildings were thatched. From this "modern" thatched houses developed by way of the mediaeval long house and the rather more familiar cottage.

Thatched rooves were not a purely British invention. Examples can be found all over the worlds including the German "Fachhallenhaus" or Low German House, a timber framed farmhouse found in Northern Germany and the Netherlands. It is built as a large hall with bays along the sides for livestock and the living accommodation at one end. Thatched housing was also popular in China and Japan as well as Vietnam where these houses tended to be built on stilts.

Lee explained that in Essex generally, houses were thatched with long straw that these days is grown especially for the thatching trade as modern wheat is much shorter. This leads to the situation where the grain becomes the by-product and the long straw itself the main crop! A straw roof should last about twenty-five to thirty years before re-thatching is necessary. Further north in Norfolk the favoured material is water reed and in this case the roof can be expected to last a hundred years or more. In either case, the ridge would be straw thatch and is often patterned using a traditional mixture of scallops and beads and finished with a decorative finial often representing animals or birds. Ray showed a picture of the distinctive "Essex" finial on the barn at Elsenham Place that was said to be placed thusly to prevent witches landing on their brooms!

Lee brought in a selection of his tools and explained their use, these included Leggits, Bell hooks and Shears. He said that generally, the thatch is ten to twelve inches thick and when re-thatching, only the top six inches or so would be stripped back to good straw to avoid excessive weight of straw on the rafters. Finally the thatch is covered in

wire netting to stop birds and small vermin getting in that are attracted by any wheat grains that are left in the straw.

Thatch is very tightly packed and doesn't catch fire easily. Contrary to popular opinion thatch fires are quite rare these days and are generally caused by electrical faults.

The last illustration was of a hideous corrugated iron replacement roof that was the reason that most older thatched cottages are listed to ensure like for like replacement of the thatch takes place.

The talk was followed by a lively question and answer session.

## **5. Open Forum and Any Other Business**

### **6.1 Society Website**

After nearly six years we have refreshed the site to give it a clearer, crisper look with all the features accessible via a new side menu system on the Home Page. We have also introduced a feature which makes it more user friendly for users of smart phones and tablets to automatically adjust the display to suit the device being used to view it. There will also be a wider range of photographs that will appear on the home page on visiting, these can be enlarged for better viewing by clicking or tapping on the image.

We are always delighted to receive material relevant to the village to put on the website. Do please take a look at our new site at [www.elsenham-history.co.uk](http://www.elsenham-history.co.uk)

## **6. Thank You**

Our thanks go to Ian Beeston and Margaret Rea for preparing the teas and coffees this evening. We hope Jean Beeston is feeling better soon.

## **7. Date of Next Meeting**

Our next meeting is on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> September when our old friend Bill Hardy will be returning to speak about "The Building of Kings College Cathedral and the use of Arabic Carpenters Marks"

**ENDS**

Minutes Agreed: .....  
Ray Franklin - Chairman

..... June 2019