

Chairman's Report for 2019

2019 gave rise to a new scheme for the Society – the proposed installation of a number of swift boxes in the central core of the village. Society member David Lowe had drawn the Society's attention to the diminishing number of swifts in the UK mainly as a result of loss of habitat. He assisted the committee in identifying the most appropriate properties in the village to host the boxes and the house owners were approached to join the scheme. It was agreed that the hosts would bear the cost of the nest boxes and the Society will bear the costs of installation. Babergh District Council have given their permission for around 43 boxes to be fixed to a mix of properties, mainly within the Conservation Area. We are hoping to arrange installation in the spring and thereafter we shall keep our fingers crossed for a crop of new tenants!

COMMITTEE: I am pleased to report that there have been no changes to the composition of the committee this year so the current line up is as follows: - Chairman Mike Hunter, Vice Chairman Martin Wright, Hon. Secretary Jill Slater, John Partridge, Tom Gardiner, Lucy Carpenter, Suzanne Cullen, Frank Warren and David Heigham, our Hon. Treasurer, all of whom offer themselves for re-election in 2020 -2021. I extend the thanks of the Society's members to the committee who, as usual, have done an excellent job over the past year.

Our President Barry Wakefield and our web site manager Lorraine Brooks continue to provide invaluable support to the Society and I must also thank the large number of volunteers who assisted with the events carried out by the Society during the past year, I pass my grateful thanks to all of you.

RIVER STOUR: During the summer months the river level dropped alarmingly and in particular a stretch below the Anchor measuring around 400 to 500 metres in length dried up. The Society, together with other interested parties in the village, contacted the Environment Agency to ascertain what steps might be taken to avoid this problem in the future.

OPEN GARDENS: The record-breaking Open Gardens of 2018 was always going to be difficult to beat but 2019 ran it very close, achieving an income of £3282 our third best year ever. 23 gardens were opened including two which had not previously been seen. As usual a large number of volunteers gave their time and expertise to make this day such a success and I express the Society's thanks to all our helpers.

MEETINGS: Your committee held twelve meetings in 2019 and we held three speaker meetings and a fourth joint speaker meeting with the Nayland Horticultural Society. Our speaker at the AGM was the Chairman of the River Stour Trust. As one of the declared aims of the Trust is to make the full length of the River Stour open to navigation for boat traffic the talk might have been a little controversial but in the event was well received. At our June meeting, Sarah Cook gave an excellent talk on artist and plantsman Cedric Morris and a number of his rare Iris cultivars were available to purchase after the meeting. In October, published author Nick Amor spoke on the topic of the Suffolk Medieval Cloth Industry with particular reference to the part played by Nayland. The year was rounded off with our joint meeting with the Horticultural Society when Steve Piotrowski spoke about Barn Owls; a very topical subject bearing in mind the nesting family on the Nayland allotment field.

VISITS: The Society arranged for private visits to two historically significant properties. In May members hugely enjoyed their visit to Euston Hall the home of the Dukes of Grafton and in September we visited Hoses Hall, a 16th Century building formerly in the ownership of Lord Sainsbury and Lord Beaverbrook.

LAND COMPANY AND THE MEADOW: Members will recall that the Nayland with Wissington Land Company was created to acquire and hold the Conservation meadow, which abuts the river and a smaller area of field, which abuts Horkesley Road. The Land Company has its own board of directors and trustees and is an entirely separate organisation from the Society. However, as the funding for the purchase of these fields was raised by the Society members it is appropriate to mention the Land Company's activities in this report. The board have been considering a number of developments involving in-field and river side tree planting and the creation of a permissive footpath. An exhibition was held in the Church Hall in early November as a consultative exercise which was well received.

COURT KNOLL PROJECT: Further expert analysis of finds recovered from the excavation continued during the year and more exciting news was received to the intent that the glass analysis revealed the glass to be extremely rare and similar to that found at the palace of Westminster. Furthermore, the charcoal analysis confirmed that the wood had been finely carved. Both findings support the proposition that this was a high-status building. To bring everyone up to date with developments we held another talk at Nayland Village Hall where lead archaeologist Jo Caruth made a highly informative presentation. It is anticipated that there will be a final year of analysis in 2020 and in 2021 it is hoped that the final report will be prepared and the project concluded.

MEMBERSHIP: The Subscription remains £8 single and £12 double and the use of Standing Orders is encouraged to facilitate the collection of subscriptions. Life Membership remains £30 single and £45 double. Membership currently stands at about 260.

PLANNING: Your committee made representations on 16 planning applications during 2019. The planning register is reviewed every week by committee members and substantial consideration is given to every application. There have been some inconsistent planning decisions; for example, there were two applications for change of use of properties from commercial to residential use. One was granted and one was refused, although the facts relating to each property were very similar. It is also noticeable that the planning authority appear to give little significance to the existence of the boundary of the village envelope when considering sites which lie outside of the boundary.

SPRING FOOTPATH WALK: On the May Bank holiday Monday Chris Hunt took members on a highly entertaining walk around the Polstead area.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: The Society and some of its members has been pleased to support the Parish Council in the Spring and Autumn Litter Picks and we also assist the Village Hall Committee with our work on the garden area adjoining the car park in the seasonal working parties. We also arranged for the telephone box to be re-painted as it was beginning to show its age!

Finally, the Data Protection legislation requires that our records are dealt with in a secure manner and everyone who receives emails from the Society is reminded on a regular basis that if they wish to be deleted from our data base we shall be happy to oblige. For the avoidance of doubt our membership list is not made available to anyone or any organisation outside of the Society.

Mike Hunter
January 2020