

‘Where are the Fellows who Cut the Hay?’

– Robert Ashton’s September Talk

This talk was quite a deviation for the group as it was held in person only (not on zoom). And we sat in the round, rather than in serried ranks. So it was both a relief and very exciting to see so many attendees from local villages, Little Glemham and Rendham, as well as Framlingham, Stradbroke and Ipswich.

Robert Ashton, our speaker, didn’t disappoint, with a very interesting talk about the process of writing his book, how he researched and what will be covered in the next book.

Before Robert started, he asked the audience how many lived in the place where they were born? How many within 5 miles? About six responded positively... not many then! Robert spoke of a generation now used to travel before he mentioned how much a sense of home and belonging, of past traditions and what has been lost in the last 50 years to our sense of community, was now missing from our lives.

WHERE ARE THE FELLOWS WHO CUT THE HAY?



*How Traditions From the Past
Can Shape Our Future*

ROBERT ASHTON

Robert’s early years were spent at Needham Market and Leiston. It was in 1969 that he read George Ewart Evans’ book ‘Ask the Fellows’ but it wasn’t until 2019, when he embarked on a creative writing MA with UEA, that he completed the first 3 chapters of his book. His agent advised him to research ‘more voices’ and that took him down the path of listening to and learning about some

of the individuals who now feature in his books. Robert recounted meeting these individuals by chance: such as Daphne Savage because he visited Blaxhall Church, Paul Watkin, a thatching straw grower, at a cinema they both attended, and also intriguingly he mentioned, when in a state of undress but with notebook and pencil, interviewing a naturist!

One film that influenced Robert was ‘Six Inches of Soil’, a documentary feature film about the inspiring story of



British farmers standing up against the industrial food system, which he saw at Bungay. Robert specifically recalled one quote, “Every farmer should retail something” and it was this concept that Robert was keen to pass on to his audience. He advocated the need to rediscover our sense of community perhaps by bringing back community owned village stores rather than using a supermarket, and to reconnect with our fellow villagers. The only way this might happen, he feels, is if we take back control of our own destiny and don’t rely on others, such as the government. Robert’s message was clear - do something rather than nothing!

Robert’s talk certainly had impact as there were several farmers in the audience who are very concerned at the state of farming in Suffolk and the UK. Audience participation was lively and passionate, the in-person meeting a success for AVSFHG.

I intend to watch the 2024 documentary ‘Six Inches of Soil’ but can also recommend another on Netflix called ‘Kiss the Ground’ which covers how the earth’s soil may be the key to combating climate change and preserving the planet.

Robert’s talk and the films are very good reasons for us to rally our community and talk to our local farmers!

Jane Evans