

WEST FARLEIGH AND DISTRICT RAT AND SPARROW CLUB

MEETINGS HELD AT THE WHITE HOUSE

Since the beginning of farming, pest of all sorts have been damaging the growing crops and eating their way through stored crops. Many methods of control were used.. Small boys with rattles to keep the birds of crops, Scarecrows, traps of various types including gin traps (which are now illegal) and poisons.

During the 18th 19th and early 20th Century things were more organised and Clubs were set up to encourage the extermination of vermin.

We know that in 1917 the West Farleigh and District Sparrow and Rat Club (also referred to colloquially as The Loyal Tickle Back, Jack Sparrow and Mole Club) was in existence. The club met at the White House, meeting on the first Wednesday of the month, from beginning of October to the end of March.

Land owners and farmers from East and West Farleigh, Hunton, Teston and Barming were members paying an annual sum according to the acreage they owned. 5 shillings for those with more than 100 acres and 2 shillings and 6d for less. Working members paid 6d.

In 1917 the club had 8 honorary members (presumably the landowners), who were exempt from bringing heads. Mr R Munn, B Small, C Hickmott, G Poile, G C Froud, L Costen A Fuller and E Munn and 22 working members.

Creatures considered vermin were allotted points. Those listed included :-

Bullfinch 4 points



Stoat 3 points



Green linnet 1point
Greenfinch



Rat 2 points



Sparrow 1point



Mole 2points



Heads to be taken to the monthly meeting, between 7 and 8 pm.

The White House, headquarters of the Club



The West Farleigh & District **SPARROW AND RAT CLUB.**

RULES.

1. The Name of the Club shall be "The West Farleigh & District Sparrow and Rat Club," and includes the parishes of West & East Farleigh, Hunton, Teston and Barming.
2. Headquarters the White House, West Farleigh.
3. Members to be elected by Committee. Committee to meet not less than once a month.
4. Committee to consist of 10, including Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary, 3 to form a quorum.
5. Each Member to pay following annual Subscription—Holders of over 100 acres, not less than 5/-; less than 100 acres, not less than 2/6. Working Members 6d. Honorary Members shall be exempt from bringing heads.
6. Heads to count—Bullfinch 4 points, Sparrow 1, Rat 2, Green Linnett 1, Stoates 3, Jays 4, Moles 2.
7. Fines to be 1/4d. per point for all short, allotted by Committee.
8. No birds or rats shall count unless they are taken in the Parishes mentioned in Rule 1. Any Member infringing this Rule shall be fined 5/-.
9. Members found smoking in Stackyards or on any premises whilst catching sparrows or rats, or loading shot guns with ordinary paper instead of stout wads shall be disqualified from all prizes.
10. The balance at the end of the season shall be divided amongst the working Members, according to the number of points obtained during the season.
11. Heads to be brought to headquarters, strung and labelled, on first Wednesday in each month, between the hours of 7 and 8 p.m.
12. An Annual Meeting shall be held at the White House, West Farleigh, on the first Wednesday in April, at which the Accounts shall be audited, the funds divided in accordance with Rule 10, officers appointed for succeeding season and any other business connected with the Club transacted.
13. Season to commence the beginning of October, ending last day of March. Subscriptions to be paid to the Hon. Secretary.

L. J. COSTEN, *Chairman.*

A. WRIGHT, *Treasurer.*

R. MUNN, *Hon. Secretary,*
Barn Hill, Hunton.

At the Annual Meeting at the end of the season, funds were divided according to the number of points accumulated by the working members.

The Hon Henry Hannen lived at Smiths Hall and amongst his papers (kept by the Kent Archaeology Society) is a leaflet from the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries published in 1903 (revised in 1916) which says:-

“While no one wishes to exterminate the sparrow, it is generally agreed that any good it might do destroying harmful insects is greatly outweighed by the damage done to crops, that reduction in its numbers is as necessary as in the case of rats, or of any other destructive pest.”

Many clubs were reformed or invigorated by the onset of the First World War because there was a greater need for home grown food. Without the use of present day fertilisers and pesticides, yields were considerably lower than today and there was a need to harvest as much as possible.

In the Annual report of the club in March 1917(also in Henry Hannen’s papers) the good work of the club was reported.

1192 Sparrows	657 Rats
33 Bull finches	134 Moles
879 Blackbirds	1301 Queen Wasps
1854 Butterflies	13 Stoats
9 Jays	

8 sparrow heads would have provided the catcher with enough for a pint of beer!!

However the RSPB ,in a leaflet also from 1917 expressed unease at the killing of birds, and sought to highlight the benefits of birds to the farmer as a natural form of insect pest control.

We do not have records of when the club ceased but it was probably in the 1920’s when more modern farming methods were introduced.

However there are records of land girls, during the second world war, catching rats!.

Information was obtained from Kent Archeology Society magazine , Autumn 2011.

and Bygone Kent Magazine Vol 3 no 2 and Vol 6 no 9.