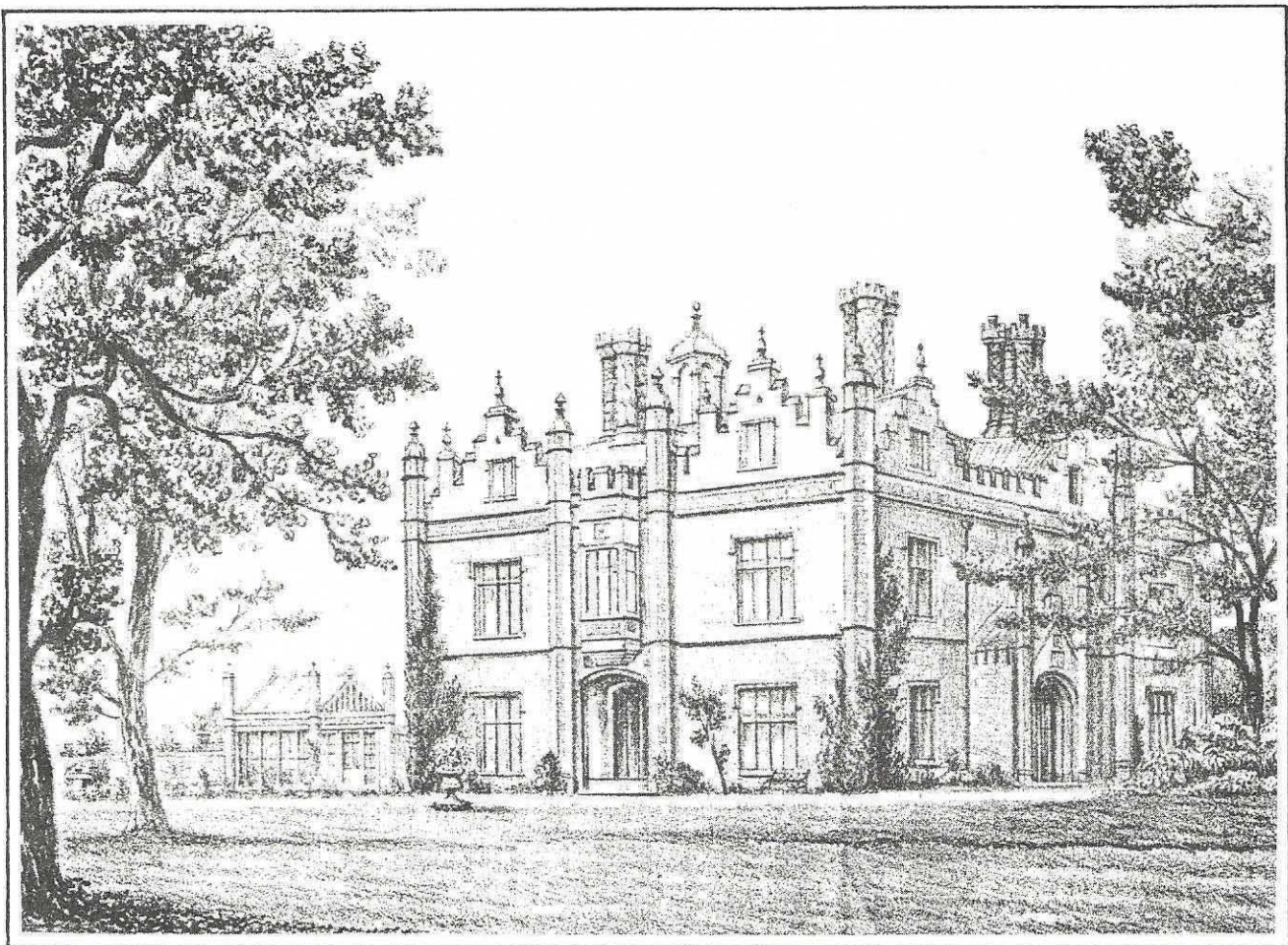


THE REEPHAM SOCIETY



Magazine

REEPHAM,

NORFOLK. NOR 71X

19



This copy of Edward Gibbs and Son invoice heading cannot be appreciated as a black and white copy. It is a wonderful mixture of red, blue and green — few letter or invoice headings today meet this artistic standard

↖ Contents ↗

Marjorie Gibbs 1899-1992	1
Edward Gibbs and Son	2
George William Reeve	8
Reepham Market Place 1902-1920	11
The Stately Homes of Reepham	19
The Ollands Estate	20
The Moor House	24

THE REEPHAM SOCIETY is a local amenity society affiliated to the Council for the Protection of Rural England and its County Branch, The Norfolk Society. It was inaugurated in 1975 by a group of local residents who were concerned that the character of the town was under threat. They were worried about the possible loss of features of historic or public interest and the risks from over-development unsympathetic to this rural environment. The Society's area of influence covers Reepham, Booton, Hackford, Kerdiston, Salle and Whitwell.

The Society co-operates with the Parish and District Councils in monitoring approved new developments and encouraging good standards of architectural

design; ensuring that materials suitable to their location are used and features of the landscape protected. Society affairs are managed by an Executive Committee of twelve members who are elected annually.

In 1992 membership of the Society had reached over 400. Open meetings are held in eight months of the year, with speakers on a wide range of subjects; non-members are welcome. A Magazine is produced periodically (at least once a year) by a Society member, Michael Black; this has customarily contained items of historic rather than current interest; current matters are reported in occasional Newsletters distributed to all members.

Marjorie Gibbs 1899 - 1992

MARJORIE GIBBS was a founder and life member of the Reepham Society and in my early days as magazine secretary she contacted me and offered me assistance with whatever detail she could supply in connection with prospective articles about Reepham.

In recent years I had made a number of visits to Marjorie and had spent many interested hours in her sitting room, listening, discussing and learning of the minutia of Reepham detail that her memory so prodigiously recalled.

One afternoon in the early summer of 1992 I went to see Marjorie at The Laurels, her home in Dereham Road, Reepham as I wanted some additional information about the Black Diamonds, a local minstrel troupe which performed in Reepham in the years just before and after the First World War - a troupe which included her father, who was a founder and subsequently a leading member.

As usual we sat and talked in her sitting room, a room that could recall a family's history and events that reflected the past century, a room that breathed memories and nostalgia. Here was the bureau that Marjorie so often went to, to find some item that contributed to her particular topic of conversation. Photographs of her father and his business, old account books that clarified a point, somewhere one of the drawers held 'the bones' that her father fashioned and then used when he was one of the four corner men in the Black Diamonds. Her father, Edward Gibbs, who figured greatly for many years in the business, parochial and religious life in Reepham and many words must have passed between the members of his family as to how the town would organise, cope with and enjoy Coronations, Jubilees and other celebrations and how the families in this close rural area would cope with the tragic unfurling of events of both world wars, particularly the First which was to take the lives of so many young men of the area, many of whom Marjorie know and whose names she could so easily recall.

Disasters, happiness, grief and joy - this room could recall them all; the pictures, the carpets, the furniture, some of it decades old, was seeping with this memory. Its very presence recalled clearly to Marjorie her life; a life synonymous with Reepham. Her childhood spent in Reepham when this area of North Norfolk was still decidedly rural - a ruralness

of silence, of dusty roads rutted by horses and cartwheels, a countryside innocent of oil and petrol. A youth spent in the slow and timeless years leading up to the First World War and in a small market town which was the central point of business for the surrounding area. A time when work was hard and long and when many weeks of endless work were intermittently broken only by the high days and holidays that the town organised and enjoyed.

At this visit, which so unfortunately turned out to be my last, she recalled the Black Diamonds and particularly the fete in the summer of 1912 at which the troupe gave their first and possibly their best-loved performance. Her memory brought back details of that day nearly 80 years ago as though she remembered it from yesterday. How at 12 years of age she had helped with the refreshments and how her father had allowed her to stay up late and go back for the evening entertainment.

Marjorie spoke of the friends she met and with whom she enjoyed herself, and her recollections of that day vividly described an era of Reepham's history that is long past and sadly no longer in the recall of most local people.

0603 870939

Middlemarch
Broomhill Lane
Reepham



MANY times Marjorie put her memories into the written word with articles in local publications, earnestly reflecting the oral history that on many occasions I was privileged to enjoy.

It is ironic that this latest Reepham Society publication contains three articles which reflect the ability and detail that Marjorie could offer; their inclusion was planned long before her death and I have no hesitation in dedicating them to her memory.

She had a great love for Reepham, its history and its inhabitants and the town has lost a dear friend with her passing; may Marjorie Gibbs long and fondly remain in its memory.

Michael Black

Edward Gibbs and Son

EDWARD GIBBS AND SON, Ironmongers and Seed Merchants, became an institution in Reepham and their shop and general agricultural services to the farming fraternity in and around Reepham is still remembered with fondness today by many people even though their shop closed many years ago. It was said that the Gibbs' business was famous for two things; firstly, its picturesque premises and the excellent service it gave, and secondly, the late Mr Edward Gibbs, who attended the business daily until he was ninety-eight.

The premises were large, with many warehouses; each one assigned to one section of the various goods stocked. Two years after Edward Gibbs took over the original business, the grocers shop adjoining became vacant and this was added to the existing shop. There was a dwelling house attached which was enlarged in 1904 to assist with the expansion of the business. Behind the front buildings there was a courtyard surrounded by the warehouses and other buildings which made up the complex which for the next 60 years was to become such a vital and well respected part of business life in Reepham.

It is said that there were ironmongers on this site long before the business was bought by Gibbs, but the exact date of the foundation of this business is not known but in the churchyard is a tombstone inscribed "William Samuel George, ironmonger of this parish who died at the age of 69 years in 1802". The George family ran the business until it was purchased by a firm called S and S W Leeds in the early 1870s who ran it until 1888 when Mr Edward Gibbs took it over.

Edward Gibbs was born in 1860 the son of a farmer; he always wanted to be a farmer but during the 1870s farming was in a bad way so he applied for an apprenticeship with James Cooper and Son, ironmongers of East Dereham. He was accepted at a premium of £30 and served his five years starting at 2s 6d a week. He stayed with them until 1887 and when he left his weekly wages had been raised to 30s. On 11th October 1888 he took over the business of S and S W Leeds and a week after he was married at St Mary's Church, Hickling. His two children subsequently became partners; his son Edward in 1920 and in about 1957 his daughter Marjorie took an active partnership.

Edward Gibbs Senior took an active part in the business until he was ninety-four, and he then maintained a daily interest almost until his death in December 1959 at the age of ninety-nine. Edward Gibbs Junior started to work for his father immediately after leaving school, and only service in the First World War intervened. A motor cycle accident in 1915 robbed him of his sight but he still carried on working in the shop. At the age of seventy-four (in 1966) Edward Gibbs Junior decided to retire together with his sister, Marjorie, although both regarded the closing of the business as a "matter of real regret". Mr Gibbs, after 60 years in the business, decided to retire for two reasons - firstly, because he wanted to; and secondly, because of a declining trade. The days of horses in farm work had long since departed; he stocked the equipment they needed for which there was no longer a demand.

It was decided in 1966 to try and sell the business as a going concern but unfortunately the firm was unable to find a buyer. Early in 1967 the stock was

Reepham,

March, 1887.

Dear Sir,

We beg to inform you that we have carefully selected, and can now offer a variety of

GENUINE ENGLISH (HOME GROWN) AND FOREIGN

Agricultural Seeds,

which we highly recommend for cleanliness, rare quality and reasonable prices. We have also some good SEED OATS, grown in this parish.

MANGOLD, SWEDE and TURNIP SEED at lowest prices.

Your kind favours are respectfully solicited by, and shall receive the prompt attention of

Your obedient Servants,

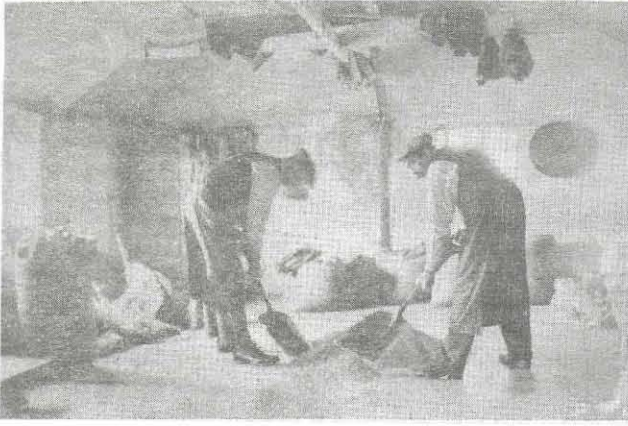
S. & S. W. LEEDS,

CORN, POLLARD, MEAL, &c.

TILES, PAVEMENTS AND DRAIN PIPES.

AGENTS FOR AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY.

S & S W Leeds ran the business until it was purchased by Edward Gibbs in 1888. This is a card presented to local farmers by this firm. Such representations today would be hard to find.



Thomas Piercy (on the left) and Edward Gibbs, Senior mixing seed in the Seed Room

discounted by 5% and this discounting continued for the next three months reaching 20% before an auction was held in April 1967 in Irelands saleroom in Reepham (now the site of the car park in Station Road) when the remaining items were sold off.

The old fashioned ironmonger's shop is now a thing of the past. Those that have survived have adapted their methods and their stock to meet today's requirements. With no horses on farms there are no blacksmiths requiring iron for horse-shoes and wagon tyres. Nobody has oil lamps any more and

there is little demand for paraffin. It is a similar story for the seed merchants. There are no horses needing hay and so there is no call for hay seed. Bullocks are no longer fattened in yards and so farmers do not grow swedes and mangolds. Much as the passing of these traditional trades may be regretted, change is inevitable. Ironmongery is just one of the many trades that once flourished in Reepham and is now gone. In 50 years time will the computers that now fill the shop premises of Edward Gibbs evoke as much nostalgia as does the smell of linseed oil and the sight of hazy sunshine pouring through the mixing of clover, rape and trefoil seeds!

The closure prompted the following article by Cyril Jolly which appeared in the Eastern Daily Press in April 1969.

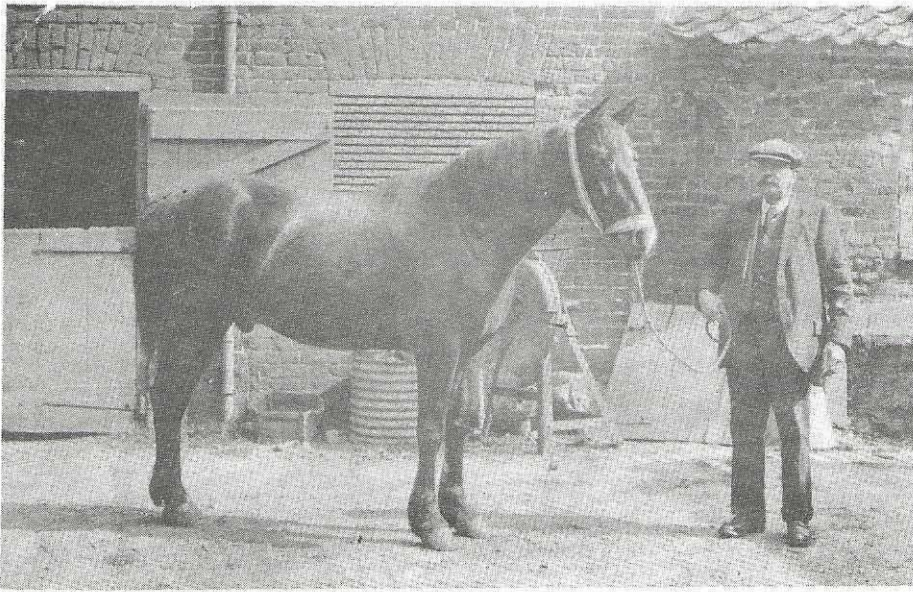
The Shop That Mirrored 200 Years of Change

The Norfolk Ironmonger's Shop now closed after 200 years of trading revealed on its shelves two centuries of social history and change

There are more interesting ways of studying social history than in books. The closing of an ironmonger's shop, after two hundred years of trading, has shown me in a fascinating way how the tides of change have ebbed and flowed over rural life. Changes in lighting, cooking, travel, farming, sport and craftsmanship - revealed by goods on the shelves of a picturesque 18th century premises making a corner of Reepham's Market Square.



This picture was taken in the 1890's a few years after the business was purchased by Edward Gibbs



*The & my Horse -
during the days of
Horse & Cart
Transport*

*Edward Gibbs, Senior with
'Monarch' - the horse was
stabled at the rear of the premises,
the area now known as
Merchants Yard.*

"The Square has its own charm, with thatched and Georgian houses, Flemish and crow-step gables, and two parish churches enclosed by the winding wall of one churchyard.

The ironmongery is itself a little kingdom, with two double-fronted shops, attics, cellars and a neighbourly medley of store-rooms and granary. Beneath four panes of 'bulls-eye' glass I entered the main shop, which resembled Hampton Court maze with its passages and stairs.

One stairway beneath the main counter led to a cellar. I bent double under the counter to enter this Ali Baba's cavern. Instead of oil jars I found two large tanks, one for linseed oil and the other for lard oil. The spillings of generations mixed with sawdust caked the floor, and wall racks held paint, turpentine, black harness oil, and preparations only old tradesmen would recognise. A dozen smells also competed for recognition; linseed oil won easily.

In an attic, beneath adze-trimmed beams, were scores of parcels that had slept snug on their dusty shelves for a century. They contained nails (mostly hand-made); nails for carpenters, builders, wagon wheel tyres and strakes; nails for shoeing horses and the bullocks that once worked ploughs; frost nails and caulking nails. Here I tried out a machine that might have eased the drudgery of knife cleaning fifty years ago. 'Tortoise' stoves elbowed door furniture into a corner, some would have graced a mansion and some a coal shed. A tub of gum arabic (used for starching shirt fronts in Edwardian times), scythe blades and plough blades, put back the clock half a century.

Climbing up cobwebby stairs to the seed warehouse, I skirted bins labelled clover, rape, trefoil and saw a set of seed riddles and a set of measures made in Dereham by Bradley and Utting and a flailing stool. The operator sat on one end, laid the corn on the other and beat it with a swipe of a hand flail.

In the yard was a gunpowder magazine for cartridges were made here. A hundred cases were set up in a frame, filled with powder, shot and wadding

and the ends rolled in with a treadle machine - now only fit for the scrap heap.

The proprietors, Mr E Gibbs and his sister, showed me the main shed with its countless drawers each bearing a sample of the contents nailed to the front. What a cavalcade of village life they represented. There were brass plug-taps for wine barrels of halls or public houses, (some had a locking device - and probably needed it). Cattle clippers, pig and bull rings, 'humbugs' for putting in the nostrils of cows when giving a medicinal drink, cheese wire; a key for fitting skates and ancient brass gear for shutters and blinds.

Some peculiar needles puzzled me - they were larding needles used to pierce meat on a spit and draw off the grease into a larding tray; I handled lamp glasses of all shapes and curious tools for many crafts made in an age when wearing value mattered more than a glossy finish.

In the office was a 'wheelers' round', used by wheelwrights to measure iron for re-tyring cart wheels, and well-thumbed price books going back to Victoria's golden reign, listing nails at 10s.6d. a cwt., a bass broom at two pence, and copper sheet at fifteen pence a pound.

My brow furrowed as I picked up a swan-necked object - a stand for goffering irons! There was an ancient machine with a turntable for sharpening horse-clipper blades; unopened boxes of candle snuffers; a whip shocket and undressed leather for pump clacks.

Miss Gibbs recalled, as a girl, selling 'penn'orths' of red ochre for smartening doorsteps, and 'penn'orths' of black gunpowder for cleaning out oven and copper flues. Had I known, in my boyhood, what fun I would have had with mother's wall oven!

As a lad, Mr Gibbs first had to collect a frisky pony from the meadow and then had to take down sixteen shutters for the shop to open at 7 a.m. It closed at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Saturdays. Thursday was half-day - it closed at 4 p.m.! He also remembered a tub containing macassa oil which his father boiled

with beeswax and oil of lavender to make a hair pomade. We looked in vain for some needles used to make up straw and oat flight mattresses.

Turning out more drawers we conjectured on the use of 'Rotten Stone' powder, and green coppers (was it used to prevent lime rubbing off walls?). There were dozens of other objects, once in common use, now museum pieces. They were facets of bygone rural life; peepholes on to a half-forgotten yesterday. In fact, beneath the many-angled roofs was two hundred years of social history, told in oil lamps, flat irons, tarred twine - and, I suppose, 'Rotten Stone'.

After Cyril Jolly's article appeared in the Eastern Daily Press, Mr Gibbs received a letter from a reader in Gislingham, Suffolk who had read about the closure but he wondered if it was possible for him to obtain "a pound or so of the 'rotten stone' powder" which so intrigued Mr Jolly. It seems that this powder mixed with certain acids and oils offered the best means of restoring the lustre to ancient copper. The reader had tried with a number of ironmongers and chemists to find some, but to no avail.

Miss Gibbs was able to supply the reader with some of the 'rotten stone' and he was able to clean some pieces of antique copper which until then had resisted all the orthodox methods of cleaning.

Thomas Piercy worked for Edward Gibbs and Son for more than 50 years and any article which refers to the history of this firm would not be complete without a mention of his time with them.

Thomas Piercy was born in 1861 and lived with his parents at Thorney Farm, Kerdiston where his father was steward. After leaving school at fourteen he worked on the farm with his father but in 1879 he decided that he did not much care for farm work and went to work for W and S W Leeds the ironmongers and seed merchants. He was employed as a carter at fifteen shillings per week (75p).

The two Leeds', uncle and nephew were both named Stephen, (not to be confused with the Whitwell tanner who was another Stephen Leeds). The elder Leeds' lived at the shop and the younger at Church Hill in the house now occupied by Mr and Mrs Betts. After working for the Leeds' for some years Thomas decided to join the Metropolitan Police but when the Leeds' heard of this they promptly revised his wages to one pound per week, quite a good wage a century ago and enough to make him change his mind about the police force.

The business was sold to Mr E Gibbs in 1888. The elder Mrs Leeds (now a widow) moved from the shop and went to live with the other (and younger)

The business premises had been enlarged in 1904 and now occupied the whole of the frontage which is contained today between Towns End Corner and the former Barclays Bank. Apparently the array of hardwood and ironmongery was brought out every morning and taken in again at the end of each day.



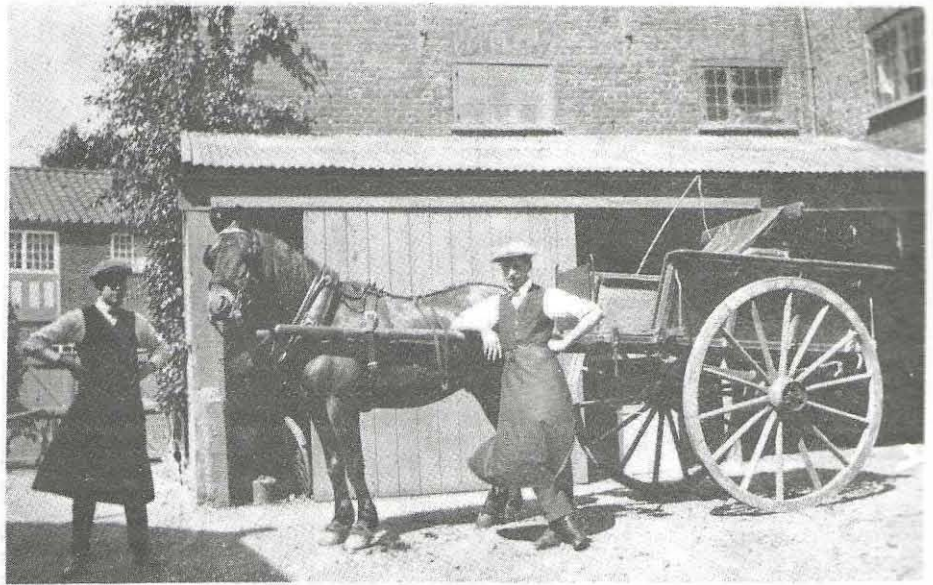
This shows the premises in the late 1930s

The Trade Horse & Cart.

Stanley shed

... with 'Monarch' ready for the day's deliveries.

During the First World War the Honourable Artillery Company was Reepham based and 'Monarch' had to share his stable with two of their horses.



The late 1950s ... and Horses

MIND YOUR HEAD

a sign stating 'Mind Your Head'. Here the various grass and clover seeds were mixed, these would be sown with barley and when grown would be cut for hay.

"Occasionally, I was allowed to accompany my grandfather with the horse and cart delivering bars of iron to blacksmiths in the surrounding district. One of these was Hardiments of Kerdiston which was where the horse went to be shod. Another was Millets whose smithy was on the main road to Sparham, in those days the road was often referred to as the turnpike. The most exciting trip was to Barrets at Lyng. In those days this involved going through the river. This was in the early 1920s when the present bridge had not been built.

"I also remember going to Weston House, Weston Longville and Heydon Hall to deliver paraffin. I believe these trips for me came to an end when Mr Gibbs replaced the horse and cart with a Ford lorry. This was driven by a man named Henry Rose; my grandfather never learned to drive".

On twenty years and wares are no longer displayed in such volume outside the shop. The virginia creeper has by this time nearly covered the whole frontage.

Mrs Leeds at Church Hill. When Mr Gibbs purchased and took over the ironmongers business he lacked experience in the seed trade. Thomas Piercy knew both sides pretty well and initially Mr Gibbs depended on his knowledge of the seed side of the business. His eldest son, Fred was taken on to learn the trade of ironmongery from Mr Gibbs, but tragically he was killed in an accident in the shop in 1904 aged fourteen.

His place was taken by another son, Wilfrid who served for a time and then went to work for a Norwich ironmonger. He was killed in action in France in 1916. Thomas Piercy became a pensioner in 1920 but still went to the shop on a part time basis. When he died in 1930 he had worked for more than fifty years in employment with Edward Gibbs and Son.

His grandson, Wesley Piercy who lives in Reepham, recalls his childhood when as a small boy he would frequently visit the premises with his grandfather. Whilst an ironmongers and seed merchants shop may not have been deemed the most interesting of places Wesley always found it fascinating.

"The shop itself had stairs under the counter leading down to a mysterious cellar and other stairs to rooms above. Throughout the entire premises there was a indescribable smell of turpentine, lard oil, linseed oil and the smell of a dozen other substances.

"Across the yard was the seed room. This was reached by ascending a winding staircase to the top floor, at the far end there was a low door with



The premises in the 1950s

George William Reeve



*The Reeve family circa 1900 at Booton.
George is next to his mother, and the other boy is Walter
who lived at Hackford Vale and for many years ran a
carrier business. He was also a JP and served on the local bench.
In the centre is Violet (now Mrs Muddle), in 1984 at the
age of 96 she drove up from her home in Kent to visit George.*

GEORGE REEVE died in May 1984, aged 94, after a very active and eventful life; his return to this area in the late 1940s quickly earned him the apt description of 'village lad made good'. He was born in Bawdeswell where his parents kept a public house, in December 1890 but after about three years the family moved to a house in Booton Street.

He started his education at Booton School, but for some reason he couldn't settle down and it seems that the remainder of his schooling took place at Lyng where he went to live with his grandmother. An early job, possibly during the school holidays or shortly after he left school was as 'odd job boy' at the Moor House. One task was attending to the pumping of water to a tank situated at the top of the House by a mule driving a pump in the garden.

The clearance of undergrowth at the Moor House in the last year or so has uncovered this old pump situated in the corner near The Moor turning, off the Norwich Road; the remains of the machinery are clearly visible to passers by.

Little is known about the next few years but in his later teens he worked in London for a corn merchant and even managed to purchase a car, quite an achievement around 1908, although on his own admission he "had to run it mainly on paraffin to keep expenses down!". While in London he became friendly with some American students who apparently spoke highly of prospects in the United States so George decided to go with them when they returned to their homeland, selling his car to pay for his passage, but being completely broke on arrival.

Throughout his life George would always find a use for his undoubted talents and making use of his motoring experience he obtained employment as a chauffeur with a well-to-do American family. Around 1914 he obtained a job with a Government construction firm in Washington (New Jersey) which with the outbreak of war in Europe became engaged almost totally in producing war supplies. He was there for just a few years and during this relatively

short period he enjoyed remarkable employment success, rising to the position of Chief Inspector by 1918. One of his most treasured possessions was a silver cup presented to him in 1918 at a dinner given in his honour by his own staff; it was inscribed 'as a token of esteem by his Inspectors and Checkers'.

This dinner and presentation was recorded in the local paper at the time -

WASHINGTON PARK (N J) GOVERNMENT MAN HONOURED 18 May 1918

A party of 35 men inspectors and checkers from Woodbury and vicinity gave a theatre party Thursday night in Philadelphia to their chief Mr George W. Reeve

After the theatre the gentlemen were escorted to Krugler's magnificent banquet hall where a well loaded table provided for all the wants of the inner man.

Many pleasant after-dinner speeches were made, Mr W J Charlton acting as toastmaster.

Bobbie Nash of Billy Watson Co., now playing at the Casino Theatre, was an honoured guest and pleased the boys with many anecdotes and stories. Mr Charles Hill presided at the piano and with his delicate touch brought forth melodies that inspired the boys to do the two-step. During the evening Capt. C P Budd on behalf of his fellow employees presented an inscribed cup to Mr Reeve who responded with a few well-chosen words, heartily thanking everyone for their loyalty and support.

After the war there was a decline in the type of work that he had been involved with during the past few years and he decided he wanted to make his way so he traded on his own in the business of removals; he built this up and for a number of years was successful and employed several drivers to carry out the work. The large influx of immigrants to the USA in the early post-war years meant there was a considerable transient population at this time

and George's decision to be his own boss was more than justified.

Information about the next few years is hazy. These were the years of the Wall Street crash and the Depression which hit America so hard and then spread over most of the major manufacturing countries of the world. During the mid/late 1920s George had some connection with the manufacture and selling of oil burner stoves with the trade name of 'Islander'.



It is not known whether George dealt with the 'Islander' as a sideline to his removal business, whether the manufacture and selling was carried out under licence or whether George actually invented the stove.

After a gap of nearly 30 years George returned to England in July 1936 but, as he had acquired American citizenship in the previous years, he was only allowed an Alien Permit to land for six months and with no authority to find or enter into any employment. After a few months he returned to America but came back in 1939 with permission to stay for twelve months.

For a time he stayed with his sister, Mrs Muddle, at Lyng and for some time at his parents' house at Booton. In 1940 he stayed at a Hotel in Thetford which seems to have had something to do with the restrictions on his activities as he was still classified as an alien. He had by then managed to acquire another car and, according to an entry in his passport, was officially 'allowed to use his car in connection with his business', whatever that was at the time. In February 1941 he was exempted from the 'Alien Restriction Order' on such occasions as when called upon for Ambulance Duties, and unconditionally exempted in October 1941.

Soon after the end of the war he started building a house on the Norwich Road/Moor Corner in Reepham. This was a house with a character entirely of its own, and built in the American style with a big basement and an off-the-ground verandah which went all round the building. George made the hollow concrete blocks for the walls and he also made individually the concrete and sand red tiles. The house was centrally heated with an automatic burner using diesel oil which was thermostatically controlled with the main unit situated in the basement. In 1946 such a unit in a house in this country was indeed unusual, but his years' manufacturing the 'Islander' obviously played a great part in the innovation. The unit provided heating for the whole house as well as producing the domestic hot water.

George moved into this house, always known as 'New House', Norwich Road thereafter, in 1946 and

within a few years had developed the garden; pedestrians along the Booton end of the Norwich Road were well rewarded as they glanced through the open gateway with a vista of well laid-out flower beds and quasi natural shrubberies. He established a tyre business in a separate building which was situated just inside the gateway and he carried on with this until the mid-1960s although one of the large metal signs remained visible to passers-by until the house was sold.

On the domestic side of his life it appears that George at some time married a British girl who joined him in America but could not settle to the life there. She returned to this country and they were subsequently divorced; there was one son from the marriage. George later married an American girl and his son from that marriage is still in America. It seems that this marriage was over before he came back to this country in 1936.

During the last 10 years of his life George's health declined and he received devoted care from his housekeeper, Mrs Betts, who gave much assistance in the original compiling of the notes that led to this article.

For many years there was an ironwork seat which stood on the Moor Corner looking up the Norwich Road towards Booton Street. George placed it there and cemented it in when he heard that the authorities were planning to widen the road by taking in the wide green verge, which he claimed belonged to him. At that time the road was not widened and the seat remained. A number of years later (and after George had died) it was widened and the seat was moved to the opposite side of the road.

Sadly little remains to-day of the items that George so profoundly stamped on this corner of Reepham. The house has been replaced and his garden and shrubberies were swiftly and sadly removed by mechanical digger. The outbuildings, the metal advertising signs and the ironwork seat are now gone. It is ironic that the only thing that George would recognise to-day is the remains of the mule-driven pump in the corner of the Moor House grounds - the one item that was there before all the others!



The 'New House' shortly before it was sold in the late 1980s

Reepham Market Place 1902 - 1920

*The story of Reepham Market Place
in the early years of the century as seen
by the eyes of a child*

REEPHAM, having a cattle market, liked to term itself a Town. The centre of that Town was indeed the Market Place and so it was the vital centre and always referred to as 'The Town'. Even today the older generation will remark that they are going in to 'the town' to shop, or across 'the town' if proceeding further or even meeting someone in 'the town'. It has many nostalgic memories for me - indeed I have a very affectionate regard for it. It was the centre of most activities, since the Parish Council (of Hackford only in those days) consisted mostly of residents of the Market Place.

It had street lamps of a kind, about four lanterns attached by iron brackets to the walls in various dark corners. These contained oil lamps complete with chimneys and a lamp lighter was employed by the Council. He was responsible for keeping the lamps filled, trimmed and he lighted and extinguished them at the appropriate times. They were not used at all during the summer months. The only lamp lighter I can remember is Mr James Wasey. During the First World War the lamps were not lit at all and in the dark winter evenings I used to walk to Guides with a cycle oil lamp.

The social life of the Market Place was almost a community in itself. Messrs Austin (butcher), Fisher (grocer and draper), Hall (saddler and harnessmaker), Peck (general stores), Cocking (shoe sales and repairs), Riches (high class grocer) and Gibbs (ironmonger and seed merchant) all had premises in the Market Place. They were all members of the Parish Council and most of them served on various committees that were formed from time to time.

One of the highlights of the year was the Fair on June 29th and I can remember the excitement of us youngsters when the Market Place was invaded by vans, roundabouts, coconut shies, shooting galleries and stalls selling home-made rock of many flavours and much stickiness. They usually stayed for a week to the delight of the younger generation, although the adults were glad when they left owing to the noise and many other inconveniences. Stalls were gay and lighted by paraffin flares. The majestic engine with its shining brasswork was admired and wondered at by everybody as it provided the power



Probably taken in the 1890s — showing the original roof line of Hall's shop (the Saddler and Harness maker)



to run the roundabout, the organ with its repertoire of tunes and current for the lighting system. The organ was also a strain on the pockets of the youngsters for pennies, which often had to be supplemented by a visit to their parents two or three times during the evening! The vans were drawn up side by side on the King's Arms plain facing the road and the horses were put to grass on the meadow. We used to visit the 'Fair people' and take them fruit and vegetables, since my mother always remarked "Poor things, they have no gardens". One family came year after year and we would be asked in to the van, so spotlessly clean - a wonderful house on wheels and I wished I lived in it! People would throng in from the surrounding villages and make it a real frolic. I was told to be home by 9pm for bed, but I would lie awake listening to the organ playing its repertoire of the topical tunes of the day and waiting for God Save the King at 11pm.

Disturbing the quiet of the week, each Wednesday saw scenes of much activity when market day arrived. Farmers drove in with their horses and traps, the latter of various shapes and sizes. The horses were taken out of the shafts and stabled at the King's Arms or The Sun, though some preferred the lesser hostleries such as the Lord Nelson, The Greyhound, Duke of York or George and Dragon. The carts were parked on the Market Place or in the yards of the selected stabling.

Farmers used to congregate to talk to each other and exchange views and farm gossip, bargain with the merchants to sell their corn, or go to the bank

for wages, and do most of their farm shopping at the local ironmonger's and agricultural engineer's. If the sale yard was too full, calves and sheep would be kept there until such time as there was room in the saleground. The market place was the central meeting place of everyone.

On Sundays the Salvation Army band would hold services in the Market Place afternoon and evening. The band was very good in those days. Two Army officers were in charge and the Army had a good cause here. I would always run to the window to see them march by as they paraded to the barracks in Norwich Road via the Back Street - that is, if I was not in Sunday School in the afternoon.

The market place set the scene for another 'once a year' occasion. The Oddfellows held a district church parade, usually on Whit Sunday evening, when men, and in some cases their wives, came in from various lodges, arriving by wagonette, horse brake, horses and traps or bicycle. The men met at 6pm on the market place, looking very impressive in their various coloured sashes, and following a very imposing banner bearing the symbols of the Oddfellows, they would march to church via Back Street.

In those days the churches were not amalgamated, and I think the Oddfellows' service was held alternatively in St Mary's and St Michael's. After the service they would again parade with the band (usually the Dereham Volunteers' Band, proceeding along Norwich Road, Reephram Moor, and Cabbage Court (now New Road) to Station Plain and back



to the Market Place via Station Road, collecting money en route. They would then disband and repair to either the King's Arms or The Sun to 'whet their whistles'. As a child this was a highlight and my mother would entertain one or two the the wives during the parade and we would keep open house with coffee and cakes for anyone my father or my brother brought in afterwards. It was a 'treat' for me to be allowed to stay up to watch the parade after church.

I cannot recall the Coronation of Edward VII but to celebrate this I believe marquees were erected on the market place and the whole village attended a feast of cold salt beef and pickles (I don't think salads were so fashionable then), with plum pudding to follow. As a souvenir every child was given an enamel mug bearing the picture of King Edward and Queen Alexandra.

Another feature of life in the market place during the winter months was the weekly dancing class held in the King's Arms club room. I envied my sister and brother who were old enough to attend this very popular pastime. Most of the young ladies and young farmers from the district attended (even Mr Peck, though not so young!). The culmination of all this was the annual dance, held in the same place. Miss Boon supplied most of the music on the piano and the dance usually finished by midnight.

The King's Arms had a flourishing Bowls Club, well supported by the market place residents.

Another daily event in the the market place comes to my mind. At 6am the people living there were

often awakened by the arrival of the mail cart and its noisy driver. The cart was like an ordinary heavy trap, with a covered-in portion behind for the bags of mail, and was red. The horse was given a nose bag while the driver knocked up the post master. He came every day including Sunday.

At the turn of the century the cottage which is now situated next to Ewings the Estate Agent, was the Parish Reading Room. This was run by a committee most of whom were parish councillors, with Doctor E V Perry as Chairman. Downstairs was a public room with daily newspapers and a number of periodicals such as 'Tit-Bits', 'Pearson's Weekly' and 'Exchange and Mart'. A number of monthly magazines were available along with the 'Illustrated London News' and 'Punch'. Upstairs was a library which consisted mainly of second-hand books which had been collected from various sources over the years. There was another larger room upstairs which contained a full-sized billiard table; this was mainly patronised by the younger men and boys while their more sedate elders read the papers and smoked in comparative peace downstairs. In 1911 Mr Sam Bircham leased part of Hackford House to the Reading Room committee and all the papers, books, furniture and equipment including the billiard table were removed to these much more suitable premises. The old reading room remained empty until the war when it was used as a billet by soldiers based in Reepham.

During the War the Town Hall (known in those days as the Old School) was used as a Red Cross

REEPHAM MARKET PLACE, NORTH.



REEPHAM MARKET PLACE, SOUTH.



REEPHAM MARKET PLACE BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

REEPHAM MARKET PLACE, EAST.



REEPHAM MARKET PLACE, WEST.



— note some of the businesses remembered by Marjorie Gibbs: Austins, Fisher, Hall, Peck and of course E. Gibbs



*'The Black Diamonds'
in their make-up and
finery ready for a
performance*

hospital run by Lady Grace Parry, who headed a team of nurses who lived at Hackford House; with so many young men away the facilities offered by the billiards room were used by convalescing soliders as part of their recreational facilities.

In 1919 Mr Bircham gave Hackford House to the parish as a war memorial and it was re-named The Bircham Institute (now The Bircham Centre).

Musically the residents of the Market Place could be an entertainment in themselves. Mr Fisher was organist at the chapel, choirmaster and also conducted Glee Parties. Mr Cocking played the bass fiddle and trombone, Mr Juby the violin, Mr Edward Gibbs junior the violin, piano or any other instrument he could find, and with residents from other parts of the town a string band was formed, not grand enough to be called an orchestra. Local concerts for various charities were given in the old school, Mr Peck singing in his light baritone voice, part-comic, part-sentimental songs that not always succeeded in being funny. Miss Boon was a willing accompanist and would also sing well-known ballads of the day such as 'Don't Hurry' and 'The Song that reached my heart', accompanied on the piano by Miss Austin who lived next door and who was also pianist with the string band. Mr Austin had a rich tenor voice and could always be relied on to sing 'Nirvana' or 'Thora'.

Mrs Wilton and lastly the Gibbs family would sometimes help. My father was ever popular with repeated requests for one of his six or seven humorous patter songs, for some of which he had never seen the music and for which my brother would invent accompaniments.

Since my father had a gift of wit and great humour he could always be relied on to make a racy speech of introduction or pass a vote of thanks. The elder daughter would recite and the son, with that rare gift of improvisation, would play the piano or organ and any instrument that he could find for his collection. He even invented an attachment for

the piano which was like organ pedals and produced music from bells, each pedal playing one bell. The younger daughter (myself) only came into the music picture about 1913 by playing accompaniments on the piano and piano solos, and even at an early age was in great demand to sing childish songs. Throughout the war she sang in concerts for the troops. Her voice was trained but she could never pursue a musical career as intended as with the shortage of manpower she had to leave Dereham High School and make a career in the family business instead.

In 1910 with several 'outsiders' from other parts of the town and surrounding district the musical gentlemen of the market place formed a highly successful minstrel troupe, calling themselves 'The Black Diamonds'. Mr Le Neve, the relieving officer from Dereham Road, was interlocuter, the two cornermen were my father as Bones and Mr Sidney Eglinton as Tambo. The assistant cornermen were Messrs Austin and Peck. They rehearsed in the club room and were in great demand as entertainers. The troupe had a strict code of dress, with coats of black sateen and red buttons, dark trousers with white shirts with small red bow ties the two cornermen had cutaway evening coats, red waistcoats, very large bow ties and red stripes down their trousers; the two assistants had similar outfits but with small bow ties.

Mr Neve, the interlocuter, sat in a high chair in the middle of the back of the stage and his task was to control the overall performance; with his exaggerated bow tie, evening coat with contrasting cuffs, button hole and a large watch chain across his waistcoat his imposing presence left the audience in no doubt as to who was in charge!

The first major performance of the Black Diamonds was given at the fete held on 20 June 1912 at the Dereham Road home of Doctor E V Perry (now Eynsford Lodge). They had been practising hard for the previous year and had met twice a week and rehearsed in a barn a little further along Dereham

Road (now part of Tylers Mead). For their premiere a covered proscenium was erected, the String Band accompanied and the performance, along with the rest of the fete, was a huge success. The stage was unique in those days in that it was lighted by electricity supplied through the gardens by land line from Mr John Dixon, who at the time had the cycle shop on the corner of Towns End.

The arrangements for the fete were carried out by a committee consisting mainly of gentlemen from the market place, with their wives forming the tea committee. It commenced at 2pm and with the exceptionally fine weather throughout the afternoon and evening a large number of local people were attracted and stayed and enjoyed themselves. The first part of the afternoon's proceedings were taken up by the band (which had paraded from the Market Place) and a detachment from Watts Naval Home, North Elmham, who performed various military, musical and life saving drills. After the boys had finished their performance they were provided with a substantial tea which was topped up with further light refreshments just before they left. By 7.15pm a large crowd had assembled to enjoy the first part of the evening's entertainment, The Black Diamonds under the musical directorship of Mr George Storey, who was also the bandmaster of Reepham String Band. The troupe performed for more than two hours and their programme of songs and choruses, some serious others humorous, was well received and several well-deserved encores were given. As dusk descended the garden was illuminated with hundreds

of fairy lamps festooned along the paths and amongst the trees and bushes. These lamps consisted of coloured glasses about the size of a large cup, each containing a nightlight, and were lit ready for the String Band which played for dancing on the lawn until well after 11pm.

The whole affair was a great success, not least financially, and the proceeds were devoted to the Reepham and Hackford Nursing Fund.

The friendly market place took on a different aspect with the outbreak of war in 1914 and everything seemed changed. Market days still continued, but with less enthusiasm. Local men were either called up or volunteered for the forces, and with the arrival of troops the market place became a parade ground. We had army personnel here throughout the war, billeted in homes and various buildings. There was much excitement when the first troops arrived in late 1915. These were the 'A' Company of the Honourable Artillery Corps. I well remember them arriving on horses with their equipment.

We were awaked by the sound of reveille from the market place at 6.30am and it was also sounded from various other points in the town. During the day were heard 'Come to the cook-house door' and later, at sunset, the 'Last Post'.

To the younger generation who did not realise the seriousness of war it was a thrilling sight to see the Company on horseback lined up for inspection on the market place, probably before going around the country-side on manoeuvres, and many a child was late for school in consequence. This group of



1916 — Marjorie Gibbs is taking the picture in the centre foreground

peacetime soldiers who were called up at the outbreak of war were drawn from all quarters of city life in London - stockbrokers, solicitors, actors, musicians and all grades of professional life. It was Reepham's boast that it held a very special regiment. These men entered into the village life and were very welcome guests in many homes. The officers' mess was at the Ollands and the NCO's and men were in billets. The horses were kept in various stables in the town and we had two, as well as our own horse, in ours. We had two sergeants billeted with us. One was a dentist from Hanover Square, London who by way of contrast was the Saddler Sergeant. The other sergeant was a highly qualified engineer and he was the Wheeler Sergeant, so he was more or less dealing with machinery. Although the sergeants' mess was at Brewmere, these two invariably had their evening meal with us and became part of our family.

The very small artillery guns of the H.A.C. were kept and guarded on the market place. One vivid memory of the H.A.C. is still very much imprinted on my mind. It was New Year's Eve. We had kept open house for most of the evening for coffee and drinks for several of the officers and men with whom we had become friendly. (There seemed to be a great camaraderie amongst these troops and the various ranks mingled with each other very freely). Nearing midnight everyone came out of their houses and a huge ring was formed entirely round the market place. Soldiers and civilians linked up, in rather a merry mood, and we all sang 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Home Sweet Home'. For a very young teenager, taken care of by one of the sergeants of the household, this was, as I have already said, an unforgettable experience.

If the market place could feel it would have thrilled as it listened to about 150 folk of all ages singing the Old Year out and the New Year in. It was with much sorrow that we saw the H.A.C. depart for

active service in the spring of 1916. The Middlesex Yeomanry with horses, followed during the next winter and the year after that the Hampshire Yeomanry arrived on bicycles and then instead of the market place being a parade ground with horses, we saw bicycles lined up for inspection. By this time a small YMCA was functioning in the King's Arms club room. A succession of regiments followed and each one entered into the life of the village, although we did not have another New Year's Eve on the market place.

During the war several of the market place gentlemen were special constables and would be on duty in pairs, working on a rota system. The young generation became adept at avoiding their respective fathers, not wishing to be caught with a special army friend.

When peace was declared and Reepham was again without its troops it never seemed the same. The tone of the town had altered, some men did not return, some were crippled, some had been prisoners of war and we all felt war weary and in a much more thoughtful mood.

However, the old market place itself never changed and it returned to its peaceful splendour and serenity, as it is to-day.

EDITOR'S NOTE Most of this essay was originally written by Marjorie Gibbs as a contribution to a study of Reepham and the surrounding villages. Whilst the bulk of the original article has been used. I have included some additional material, particularly that relating to the Black Diamonds and the 1912 Garden Fete. The inclusion of this article and the proposed changes were agreed in principle by Marjorie a few weeks before her death. I feel sure that she would have approved of the final result and that she would want me to stress her original comment that any critical remarks were not meant to be unkind in any way, but were merely a child's impressions and thoughts, seen mostly from a humorous angle.

*Taken in the early 1900s
it shows the ivy clad
church of St Michael's*



The Stately Homes of Reepham

ONE of the saddest aspects of change, particularly since the Second World War, has been the passing of the big houses in and around the Reepham area.

Up to the 1920s, Reepham could point to a number of these modest 'Stately Homes of England' and all they meant to their local rural communities. Hackford House (now known as The Bircham Centre), situated in the Market Place is one such residence that is but a shell of its former opulence. The home of a branch of the Bircham family, it was given to the town as a thank-offering for the peace which followed the 1914-18 war, to serve as an indoor recreational centre know as The Bircham Institute. Its many rooms provided accommodation for meetings, particularly to many local voluntary groups and clubs; and this use continues today. It also offered facilities as consulting rooms for visiting Veterinary

Surgeons, a Dentist and on Market Days a room was regularly taken by a Chartered Accountant.

Hackford Hall, the erstwhile seat of the Collyer family exercised a considerable influence for many years and although it underwent many vicissitudes after Brig-General J J Collyer left it in the 1930s it was restored to its proper use as a residence and has remained so since.

Whitwell Hall is another residence, that although still accessible in some ways to the people of Reepham, is no longer used for the purpose for which it was built. The last person to use it specifically as a family home, left in the mid-1930s and it stood empty until 1938 when it became a school. The outbreak of the Second World War saw the early closure of the school and it was used during the next few years by the military who exacted their usual toll on the building. Set in parkland of some 40 acres it was farmed after 1945 by Mr A H Ivins and there was the introduction of using the premises for summer camps. This use, was most successful, as it still is today, and there are many children living near and afar who have fond memories of this building and its grounds.

There are two other big houses which deserve mention and these are the subject of greater detail. One has been demolished, this was Reepham House formerly known as The Ollands, a charming residence that retained its character and use until the 1960s, and secondly, The Moor House, a residence remembered for its beautiful well laid out gardens and which, after many years of neglect has now been restored to an element of its former glory.

The Norwich Road entrance to the Ollands Estate





The Ollands Estate



THE area in Reepham that we know as Ollands Park and the adjoining area of Moor House Close (bounded by New Road) was formerly the Ollands Estate, this was an area of nearly 19 acres of parkland, gardens and lawns overlooked by a mansion originally called 'The Ollands'.

The Mansion was built in the Elizabethan Style by William Bircham Esquire in 1832 and at some substantial cost. The interior was adorned with superb oak carvings and was decorated and finished in an expensive manner which offered a high degree of refinement and taste for a moderately sized establishment. It was built with the main rooms facing to the southeast and during the early years the grounds were developed so that eventually the house stood surrounded by park-like lawns adorned with ornamental timber and enclosed by plantations of trees and shrubs. The House consisted of the following rooms:

In the basement there were a number of arched ale and wine cellars.

The ground floor had an entrance hall with inner glazed doors, a vestibule with doors leading into the garden, a drawing and dining rooms, study, back hall, housekeeper's room, butler's pantry, kitchen, cook's pantry and scullery. The main rooms were fitted with carved oak mantelpieces and all floors were paved with stone.

The first floor was approached by a broad oak staircase which was lighted by a large fine stained glass window. There was a central boudoir, eight sleeping and dressing rooms and a bathroom (fitted with a bath and water closet).

There was a second floor with four large bedrooms and an open landing.

Outside there was a rear courtyard with a servants hall, knife and coal houses, larder, large bin and a force pump which filled the cistern at the top of the House.

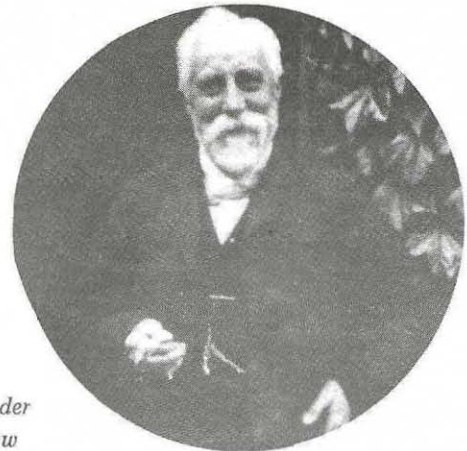
A House of this size had to have its own transport and this was accommodated with stabling situated around a paved courtyard, it comprised a double coach house, a stable with four stalls, another stable with three stalls and a box, all with lofts above, a harness room, a second smaller coach house and a range of outhouses. Nearby was a coachman's house built in the same style as the House.

In the years after the House was built the gardens were developed and after a few years it was surrounded by flower gardens, a rosary, walled fruit garden, outside vegetable and fruit gardens and an orchard, supported by tool and fruit houses.

A large conservatory was built near the House, also there was a double vinery (70 feet long) complete with hot pipes and a heating room, mushroom house, melon yard, various pits, potting houses and a large soft water tank.

William Bircham lived in the property until the estate and various other areas of land that he owned in Reepham were sold at auction in July 1883. The House would have become available for possession by the new owner at Michaelmas that year but there is doubt that William Bircham moved out after the sale. Kelly's Directory of 1885 lists the occupants of the House as William and Henry Bircham (his son).

The next owners were Mr and Mrs Kendrew who lived there from about 1890 onwards. In 1914 Alexander Kendrew died and although the House was still owned by Mrs Kendrew until her death in 1920, she did not live here during the Great War.



*John
Alexander
Kendrew*



*Mary
Kendrew*

In 1916 the House is recorded as being unoccupied but records also show that it functioned as a Officer's Mess for certain periods during these dark years.

In the early 1920's, Mr Edward Phillip Oppenheim lived here and it was known as 'Reepham House'.

Although now generally forgotten, E P Oppenheim was during this period a famous novelist who wrote about 150 books, mainly travel, in addition to many newspaper and magazine articles in this country and the USA. To avoid paying certain taxes he moved to the French Riviera in 1925 and his daughter and her husband, Mr and Mrs Ryder Smith, continued to live here until 1928.

Certain local opinions in Reepham have expressed, in recent years, that the House was lived in during the 1920's by the more famous novelist, Henry Rider Haggard. This is now clearly accepted as being untrue although there are a number of comparable points that led to the apparent acceptance of this error of memory.

They were both writing novels at the same time and were famous during the 1920s; both lived in Norfolk (Rider Haggard at Ditchingham) and they both abbreviated their christian name to the first letter.

Edward Oppenheim's daughter and son-in-law, Mr and Mrs Ryder-Smith, lived at The Ollands and the similarity of names (with Rider Haggard) probably, more than anything else, fostered this mistake.

It is highly likely that the two authors were socially acquainted and more than likely that Rider Haggard visited 'Ollands House' but he never actually lived there.

A few years of Mr Oppenheim's occupancy are still well remembered today by some of Reepham's residents. When Mr Oppenheim moved in he brought with him his own butler and a chauffeur, recalls Wesley Piercy. The butler was a Mr London and he lived in the house (now known as Echo Lodge) which was originally built as the coachman's house. The chauffeur, Mr Mair, lived in one of the pair of cottages in Norwich Road, opposite St Mary's

School. The other cottage was occupied by a gardener, Jimmy Smith and his wife Polly. Jimmy may have been a gardener but he also had a reputation as a Reepham character and one who was partial to more than the odd half a pint of beer, much to the chagrin of Polly who was always trying to alter his ways to those of a more temperate nature.

The large field known as Mill Hill and now covered by the Moor House Close estate was part of The Ollands' grounds. It had been let by the Kendrews to a local farmer for use as arable land but Mr Oppenheim stopped the letting and laid it down to grass. Two or three local boys living in the New Road area went as a deputation and called on Mr Oppenheim to ask his permission for them to be allowed to play on the field. This was kindly granted on condition that they stayed out of the plantation areas. A splendid field on which to play football or cricket after school was gained and at weekends the Band of Hope football team played their home matches there.

On the fifth of November each year, on this field Mr Oppenheim provided a great firework display which was supervised by the butler and other members of the staff. There were enormous rockets and other fireworks far bigger and better than those that could be bought locally that enthralled the watching crowds, particularly the youngsters who were given sparklers to hold in their hands.

The fireworks stopped after Mr Oppenheim moved but use of the field continued until the property was sold, the kindness offered was greatly appreciated and no-one ever abused the condition concerning entry to the plantations.

When the House was sold to Mr Harmer he immediately banned everyone from the field and used it for exercising his two riding horses.



Marjorie Gibbs recalled the occasions that she met Mr Oppenheim; "the first time, he came into the shop (the firm of Edward Gibbs and Son, Ironmonger and Seed Merchants of Reepham which closed in 1967), he was wearing flannel trousers a blazer and a straw boater and walked about smoking a cigar; quite a personality and looked most elegant.

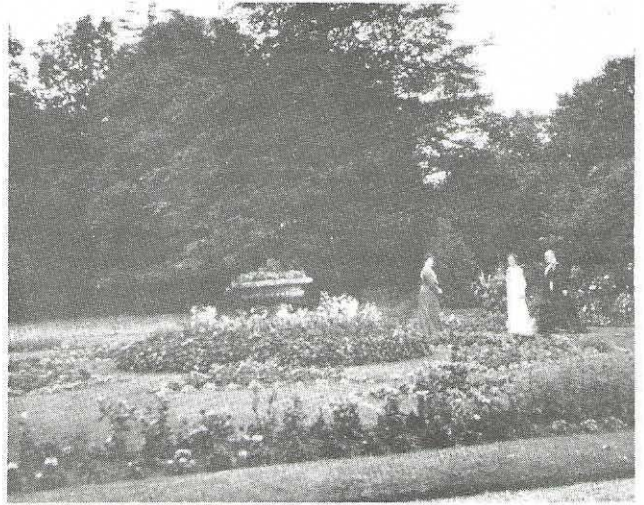
"He was a writer of mystery and detective novels and in those days he was widely read, he was probably as popular then as Agatha Christie is today.

"There was a flourishing choral society in Reepham in the early 1920s and the twenty of so members would go carol singing at Christmastime. The first night we visited the large houses in the district having first acquainted them that we would be calling. On the second night we concentrated on various houses in Reepham finishing up at 'The Ollands'. I well remember one Christmas, I think it was 1923, we were ushered into the large entrance hall by the butler, Mr London. We were greeted by Mr and Mrs Ryder Smith who asked us to sing to them. We were then regaled with hot sausage rolls and mince pies together with liquid refreshments. I can well remember Mr Ryder Smith offering me a choice of whiskey, port, sherry or coffee, I very modestly chose the latter only to be admonished afterwards by my friends for not taking anything stronger whilst I had the chance.

"At about 9.30pm Mr and Mrs Openheim - the parents of Mrs Ryder Smith - came out from dinner (both in evening dress and he with the inevitable cigar) and they chatted with each of us; this was the second time I met Mr Oppenheim."

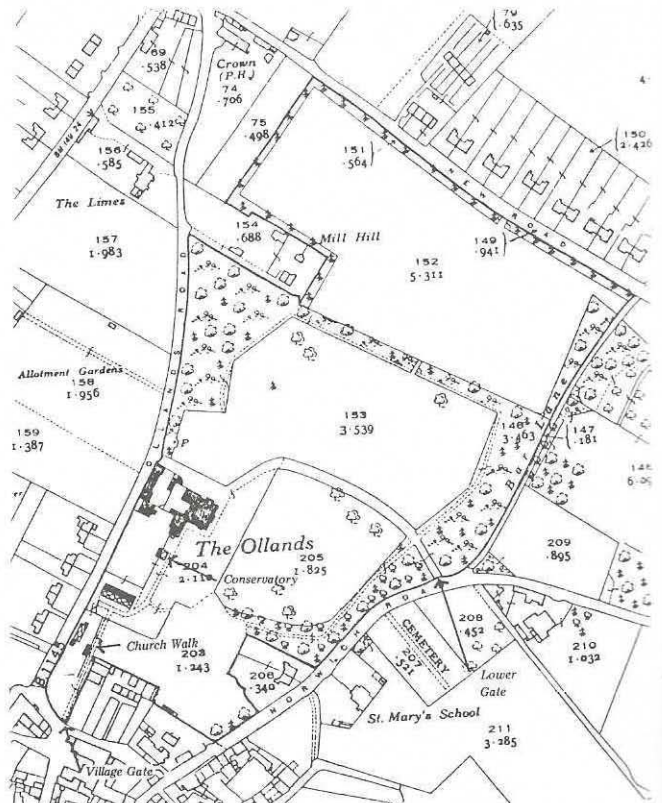
The ownership passed to Mr and Mrs T C Harmer (the Norwich clothing manufacturer) who lived there until 1950 when it was bought and lived in by Mr and Mrs F J Irwin until the late 1960s.

After the Irwins left, the house remained empty. It became prone to vandals and its glory, particularly the gardens, began to fade. There was a demand at this time for residential building land and this large accessible area in the middle of Reepham was easy prey to the planners and developers. In the early 1970s the House was demolished and grandiose plans for an estate of large detached houses was commenced. A few houses were built before the developers fell into financial difficulties and for some time the area of half constructed houses and piles of unused building materials gave the place



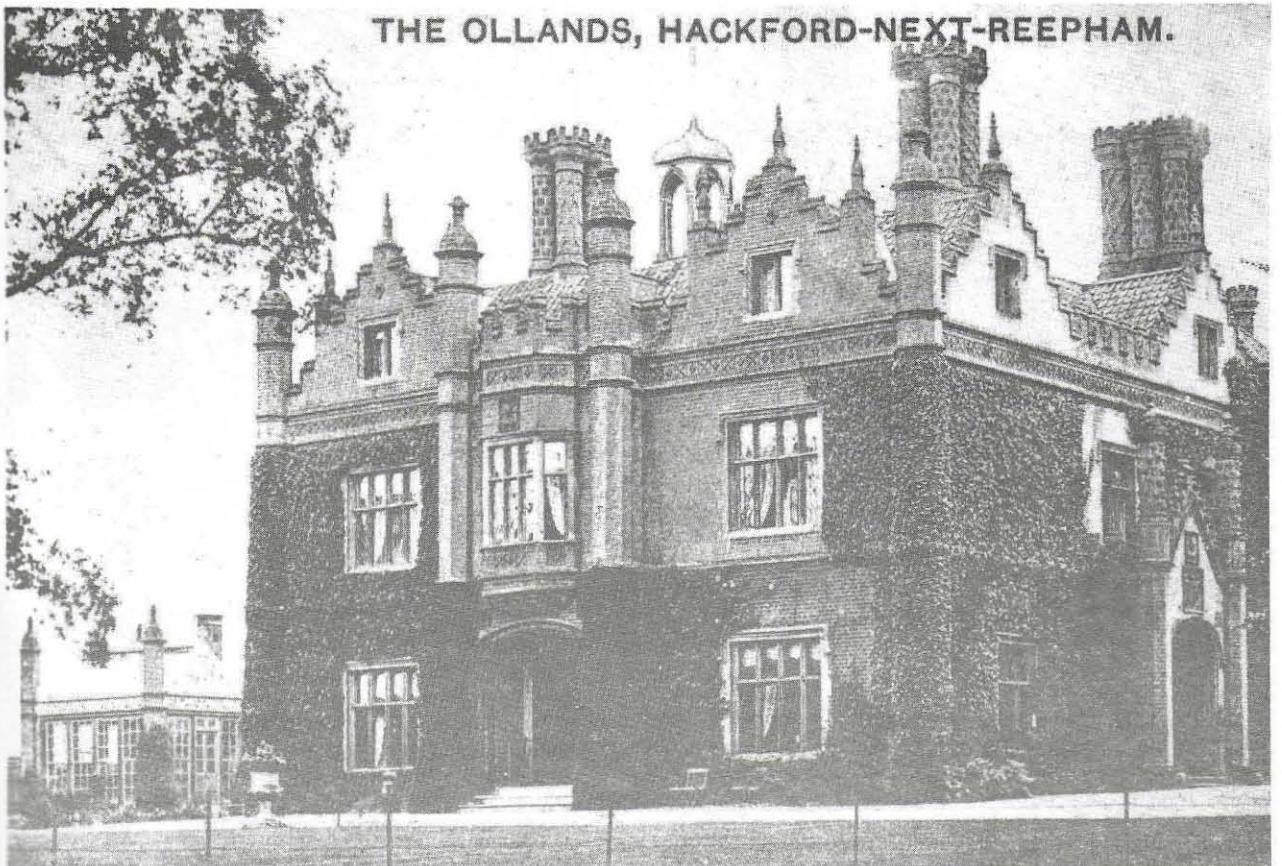
a blighted air. The work was eventually resumed by other contractors and happily by the early 1980s the work was completed and the grounds of this former splendid mansion were allowed to settle to their new use.

Many people in Reepham remember The Ollands with fondness and there are still some who can member the House in its heyday with its formal gardens, conservatory and paths wandering through the large number of mature trees. Very little remains today; Echo Lodge in Ollands Road, a few of the large trees are still there to remind us of the former grandeur and some of the road names will continue the memory of former residents of the House, notably Bircham Road and Irwin Close.





THE OLLANDS, HACKFORD-NEXT-REEPHAM.





The Moor House



THE HOUSE and the grounds that we know to-day as the Moor House were built in 1888 but there was a smaller house (with the same name) occupying the site before this date. It is difficult to detail when the original house was built, but it is known to be between 1846 and 1865, probably nearer the later date.

The tithe map of 1846 for this area shows only a general collection of farm buildings and other dwellings. In 1865 Kelly's Directory of Norfolk records a Mrs Dalrymple as a private resident living at Moor House; the Directory records very few private residents and it can be assumed that those included were persons of some financial means and social standing, and this status would no doubt have been shown in the local community by the size of their residence.

In his reminiscences of Reepham, Harry Hawes recorded that 'Mrs Dalrymple lived there, she was aunt to Mr Sam Bircham a very nice old lady, generous to the poor. She would ride about in a donkey chaise fitted with a glass front and whenever she went out she was always accompanied by her nurse'.

Mary Anne Dalrymple was born in 1778 and died in Reepham in 1875; In 1799 she was married to William Dalrymple and had ten children. It is reputed that William Dalrymple walked from Dumfries, Scotland to Norwich to join some uncles in business there. He became a surgeon and gained a national reputation for his work at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital.

One of their daughters, Marianne, married William Bircham in 1823. William was a brewer who lived at The Ollands and he owned the various tithes that today make up the area of the Moor House, and it was he who is assumed to have built the original house.

William Bircham remained in residence at The Ollands and never lived in Moor House but it seems to have been the home of members of his family. Another daughter of William and Mary Dalrymple was Catherine who, in 1837, married Francis Thomas Bircham and their son was Samuel Bircham who eventually inherited the Moor House. After the death of Mary Ann Dalrymple in 1875 a Mr Frank Parmeter of Booton Hall came to live at the Moor House. The Kelly's Directory of 1883 lists a Miss Bircham and Francis Parmeter as residing there. There was another branch of the Bircham family which lived at Booton Hall and Francis Parmeter (from Aylsham) married one of the daughters of the Samuel Bircham who resided there in the late 18th and early 19th century (not to be confused with the other Samuel Bircham mentioned above).

By the late 1870's Frank Parmeter was widowed and he went to live at the Moor House with one of his wife's unmarried sisters.

In the late 1870s, William Bircham was forced to reconsider his financial position. With the encroachment of the railways, the Bircham Brewery monopoly in this area was put under fierce competition, particularly from the Norwich Breweries, and the family were in turn placed under severe financial pressure. In 1879 the Old Brewery House and various other lots in Reepham were sold at auction by Messrs Spelman and Company.

The Old Brewery House was bought by Samuel Bircham, who although a member of the Reepham Bircham family, was a successful solicitor who lived in Surrey and practised in London.

It was ironic and perhaps satisfying to William Bircham that Samuel should purchase the Brewery House and he further extended Samuel's estate in Reepham when after William's death in 1886 he left in his will the area in, around and including the Moor House to Samuel who had to purchase his holding.

Due to his financial difficulties, William had mortgaged the Moor House and the surrounding area to Samuel Bignold in 1876. To inherit the property Samuel paid £2,250 to clear the mortgage.

As Samuel now owned all this area he decided in 1888 to clear the whole site to make the house larger and generally to turn it into a house of some magnificence. All the dwellings, farm buildings and other buildings were demolished and the whole area turned into gardens and grounds to compliment the new House. The Black Lion Public House was demolished and a new one was built on the opposite side of the road. A gardener's cottage was then built on the site of the old Black Lion. The only early building which survived behind the house was probably used as outhouses and stables to serve the original smaller Moor House.

I have been unable to find out who carried out the extensive rebuilding of the Moor House but Harry Hawes wrote in 1949 that the Black Lion was built by John Hever and Son, builders of Norwich and that his father Thomas Hawes was given the order to demolish and clear away all the cottages, farm houses and buildings which were on the site, he was also given the order to build about 50 yards of flint wall with encloses part of the grounds.

After the House was completed (at a cost of £19,000) Samuel Bircham lived there for part of the year although working in London. He also lived in Surrey where he built three further houses to live in. It is said that his wife did not like living in the Moor House and they spent their time in their various other homes. Samuel Bircham lived here until the turn of the century when it was rented to Ernest Hudson who was here from about 1903 until his death in August 1931. Whilst living at the Moor House his son Sydney died, aged 27 in 1909 and his wife Helen and second son Eric both died

in the influenza epidemic of April 1919; all four members of the family are buried in the Norwich Road cemetery almost opposite the grounds of the house where they lived.

He was fond of horses and kept a number of fine animals in the stables which still back along New Road. When the First World War came the horses were all requisitioned and taken away by the Army. Like so many other animals none of his horses came back and it is said the grief of losing them caused him never to have any more.

Ernest Hudson is still remembered today by some residents of Reepham who recall him as a large and kind elderly man. He had a north country accent and he was reputed to be part of the family that owned Hudson's Soaps; whether or not this is true he was always referred to as 'Soapy Hudson' in Reepham.

Local people who knew the House during this period remember the grounds and front gardens as always being meticulously kept. With similar attention by full time gardeners being paid to the nearby grounds

of The Ollands this area of Reepham must, during the summer months, have been wonderful to walk round and look at.

After Ernest Hudson's death in 1931 the House remained empty until the Second World War. It was kept windproof and watertight during these years until it was used by the Army during the war years.

There were many serving members of the armed forces based in and around Reepham during this time and it seems that those based at the Moor House constantly changed. Their general role was not believed to be of any great or secret importance.

In 1947 the Bircham family sold the Moor House to Dr Eglinton who used it as a nursing home until the late 1980s. During the later years the House was used by numerous film and television companies to provide settings both inside and outside for various films and programmes. The most notable being the extensive use by Anglia Television in connection with the film adaptations of a number of P D James' novels. The Moor House was sold again in 1989.



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