

## **I Remember – Part 1**

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

*As a contribution to a study of Reepham and its surrounding villages, Miss Marjorie Gibbs wrote what can only be described as a long essay, giving a child's eye view of Reepham Market Place during the period 1902–1920. An essay it may be, but it is a delightful piece of social history which encapsulates the characters, residents and activities of an age personally known now to so few people. Reepham Market Place has changed little and in a way her detail is brought to life by us being able to relate it to the buildings which have changed so little in this particular area in the past 80 years.*

*I have included a map of the Market Place and the numbers (if you cannot work it out) correspond the article with their actual position all those years ago, for example number 9 refers to Barclays Bank taking up the ground floor; they are still in the same building.*

*I am extremely grateful for Miss Gibbs giving permission for her article to be reproduced. The essay was printed and published locally in a small book in 1971 but copies are not readily available.*

Having known it all my life the Market Place to me is not just a place. In those days 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 these were not used at all and I cannot recall having an electric torch at the time. I used to walk to Guides with a cycle oil lamp.

The residents and their status are remembered as follows, commencing from Town End:

1. Facing south was Edward Gibbs, ironmonger and seed merchant; more of this business later.
2. In the cottage attached to this building was the Reading Room. This was run by a Committee, mostly Parish Councillors. Dr. E. V. Perry was the Chairman (as he was of nearly every other committee in the town). Downstairs was a public room with daily papers and such periodicals as "Tit-Bits", "Answers", "Pearson's Weekly" and "Exchange and Mart". The Windsor, Strand and Pearson's magazines were the monthlies along with the Illustrated London News and Punch. Only a very few of these publications have survived to the present day. Upstairs was a library consisting mostly of second-hand books from other libraries and added to from time to time. The large room upstairs was used as a billiards room with a full-size table. This was mostly patronised by the younger men and boys, while their more sedate elders read their papers, and smoked in comparative peace downstairs. One paid a small fee to belong to the Reading Room and my father was Secretary, I think, and general factotum, seeing that the place was kept clean, unlocking at 9 am and closing it at 10 pm.
3. The next block was divided into two parts with a shop at the corner, facing south. It was kept by Mr. Priest, chemist, who with his wife and daughters lived in part of the ground floor and the first and second floors. The previous chemist was Mr. Cripps (whom I don't remember) but who was a great friend of my father's. The Priests were what I think was termed "very genteel" and just a step above the ordinary tradesmen, since one had to "qualify" to be a dispensing chemist. The elder daughter had a small private school at "Sunnyside" on Norwich Road, (demolished in the 1960s). This was a select school for the young ladies of the town and district, and one boy attended, the son of Doctor Berry of the "White House". Either Mr. Priest retired or died but the school was removed to Foulsham and the premises vacated. My sister attended the school. I was too young and later had a much more normal education up to the age of 12 at the local Elementary (or Board) school.
4. Mr. D'Arcy Collyer, a solicitor, residing at Hackford Hall, also occupied some of the rooms facing south. An eccentric, my chief memories of him are of a bicycle which he frequently pushed, and a large dog which would bark all night if he forgot to take it home with him after an evening at the office. I should imagine he had a great love of music. He would frequently sing strange songs when he came to the office in the evening (or forgot to go home). Sometimes the songs were German Lieder, to the accompaniment of a guitar or banjo, with window wide open.
5. The corner shop was taken over by E. T. Stoner of Aylsham, as a bicycle shop and watch-mending was done as well. It was managed by Mr. W. Bishop who lived at the other end of the Market Place. I think this tenancy was relinquished during the First World War when Mr. Bishop was called up to the Services.

6. Around the corner, facing east, the basement was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Bunnett and daughters and they used the top floor for bedrooms.

7. Mr. Edward Holly had the first floor where he practised as a solicitor and was later joined by Colonel T. Purdy of Aylsham.

8. The ground floor was taken up by Barclays Bank. The Bunnetts acted as caretakers for both Mr. Holly and the bank. The bank manager was Mr. H. T. Owen. Since the four parishes had not yet been amalgamated, he was not a member of Hackford Parish Council as he lived at Moor Lodge, Reepham.

9. Next to the bank was Mr. Robert Barber, a watchmaker, a Crimean veteran, and a man to be revered since he had been in "furrin' parts". He was a gentle, quiet man having a white beard almost to his waist. My first recollection in connection with him is of a string of watches hung across the centre of the sash window and of being taken to the house to see his war medals and old shako. Later on, after his demise, Mrs. Bates came to live there from King's Head, Booton and later still Mr. Rump, the butcher from opposite the church lived there.

10. Next was Mr. John Hall, saddler and harness maker. He had a large family, the eldest son being clerk to Mr. Holly. The saddlery business flourished in those days since horses were the only means of transport (apart from the railway). Mr. Hall also made riding saddles. My chief memory is a glorious smell of leather as I passed by to go to the next shop.

11. This was a grocers and drapers occupied by Mr. George Fisher, also a friend of my father. He had a family of four, two sons and two daughters. One of the latter helped in the shop and one taught music and gave me my first piano lessons. Mr. Fisher was a very likeable, jovial man and very public spirited, as indeed were most of the tradesmen of the Market Place and the immediate surroundings.

12. The last house facing east was the barber's, complete with gay striped pole. This was kept by Mr. Arthur Fowle, a cripple, and prominent member of the local branch of the Plymouth Brethren. I believe the shop was also a centre for much gossip and argument. This business was later taken by Mr. Harry Swoish who remained there for many years.

13. Turning the corner and facing south is Old Brewery House, so named from the Bircham brewery that was at the back of this house, and owned as far as I remember, by Mr. Samuel Bircham. My first recollection is of Mrs. Bruce and her three daughters living there. When Mr. Bircham decided to live there himself, Mrs. Bruce and her daughters moved to Hackford House. One of Mrs. Bruce's daughters, Nan, married Richard Bircham. Mr. Sam Bircham had extensive alterations made to the house but after a few years, decided to return to London. Mrs. Bruce returned to Brewery House and her daughter later lived there with her family for many years.

14. Mrs. Clitheroe, an elderly lady with a lace cap worn at an angle, lived in the next house. Her granddaughter lived there also and was a friend of my sister. Miss Shingles followed Mrs. Clitheroe, a lady very fond of children, often entertaining some of them for tea. Miss Scotton followed on. She was a popular Red Cross nurse at the local war hospital during the War.

15. Adjoining was the bakery owned by Mr. Ford. He was twice married and had a large family. His bread was renowned far and wide as the best bread in the district, with a real home-made texture.

16. In the next block was Mr. William Allen's boot and shoe shop. My chief memory is of his son Robert, a very pleasant young man, who later took over the business, fitting my very small patent shoes. I always had two pairs, one for very best and one for seconds. Robert Allen had a great knowledge of his trade, sometimes making shoes for special orders, a very high-class shop. Robert Allen died comparatively young, and the business was then taken by Mr. George Cocking who remained there for many years.

17. The other side of St. John's alley was a "fancy" shop, kept by Miss Howard. Here was to be found a motley of goods, not very tidy, such as newspapers, sweets, tobaccos, odd wools, buttons, beads and cheap toys. Impressed on my mind, and to me as a small child, very mysterious, was a piano, half-hidden behind the counter. Here, in between serving ha'porths of sweets and ounces of shag tobacco at 3d. per ounce, Miss Howard would give music lessons. This was a source of wonder and even envy to me. A little friend once told me her lesson lasted all the morning. She saw everyone who came into the shop and sometimes she had a sweet. Time was no object in those days! After Miss Howard died, the business was taken by Mr. H. C. Peck (more of him later) and when he relinquished the business it was taken by Mr. F. Miller. Mr. Peck had transformed it from chaos into order and Mr. Miller with his wife continued on these lines.

18. The cottage next door was occupied by Mrs. Stonyx whom I never saw. She was a lady of means, since, when she was ill, she had a nurse, a relative of ours, from the Norfolk and Norwich hospital private staff. At the auction, after her death many antiques were discovered, including what appeared to be a painted chest of drawers bought cheaply by my father. It was discovered underneath to be of solid oak and was renovated as such. This is the house where Mr. Bishop lived when he managed Stoner's shop.

19. The corner shop was a tailors and outfitters kept by Mr. Juby, who did a fair business. He emigrated and the business was taken over by Mr. A. V. King. Mr. Juby was a violinist and assisted in the local string band.



20. Facing north and opposite Mr. Juby was a small shop, also a tailor's. I think this was kept by a Mr. Bircham, but I can only just recall Mr. Pask and family living there, himself a tailor.

21. Adjoining was a high-class grocery establishment kept by Miss Woods and her mother, also rather genteel! I can dimly remember Miss Woods, but Mr. Leonard Riches later took over the business and included the tailor's shop next door in his premises.

22. Round the corner on the square and facing west was another grocery and drapery store, kept by Mr. and Mrs. Peck. He was a cheery but rather pompous, round little man with pale sandy, curly hair but very good in helping with parochial affairs. It was his boast that he had the first pianola in the district, and I remember him remarking to my father on the occasion of his birthday that he was "half a century old today". Mrs. Peck managed the drapery side and would go to the warehouse (London, I think) to buy for her customers. A note would come for my mother that the hats for "best" wear for her daughters were now in for selection. Mrs. Peck also catered for the teas for the cricket team on Saturday afternoons.

23. Adjoining was Hackford House, occupied by the Misses Spencer, most ladylike, and as a small child I was rather in awe of them. After their departure I can recall their furniture auction in the Market Place. It was the first auction I had ever seen, and I was fascinated with the methods of the auctioneer. Mrs. Bruce was the following resident and later, having moved back to Brewery House, Mr. Sam Bircham leased part of Hackford House to the committee of the reading room in 1911. The equipment, including the billiard table, was removed to these much more suitable premises. Part of the house next to Peck's was turned into a furnishing and ironmonger's shop leased to Wallace King of Norwich, but he was not there for many years. During the 1914–18 war Hackford House was used as a nurses' home for the Red Cross hospital which was run by Lady Grace Parry and her team of nurses, in the parish hall to the rear of Hackford House garden. The reading room became redundant.

NOTE: In the early 1900s the parish hall was referred to as the Old School; it was later promoted to the parish hall and after the War when renovations were made, the building was much improved and re-named the Town Hall. During the War, the wounded from the hospital, mostly convalescents, used the billiard table and room as part of their recreation facilities. In 1919 Mr. Bircham gave Hackford House to the parish as a war memorial and it was re-named the Bircham Institute. Wallace King had vacated the premises and that part was made into a house for the caretaker: the process of transferring the deeds, etc., of the Bircham Institute took a long time to get settled and when Mr. Bircham died in 1924 the whole of the procedure had to be gone through again, since it had not been settled in his lifetime.

24. Facing north on the square is the King's Arms hotel, kept first, to my recollection, by Mr. William King. He was a blacksmith by trade and came to the King's Arms from the Greyhound in Back Street where he used the forge opposite (now demolished). I do not think he did much blacksmithing after he came to the King's Arms, but he used to drive a very smart horse and trap. Mr. John Dixon followed and then I think Mr. George Hubbard, who was there throughout the War. I cannot recall exactly the years, maybe in the early 1920s, the landlord was Mr. Devlin. His wife was Daisy Ashford who made fame with her childhood book "The Young Visitors". She did not come out much into the town but served in the bar quite a lot.

25. Under the King's Arms clubroom was a small shop, kept by various traders, one of whom was Mr. A. V. King, son of the landlord and who later took over Jubby's tailors' business.

26. In the little house next facing north lived the Misses Boon. Their father had been a shoemaker, but I cannot remember him, although I have a faint recollection of seeing their mother when I was being fitted for a dress. The two sisters were very much liked. Jane, the elder, kept house and was a dressmaker. Ethel, the younger sister by several years, was a school teacher and very musical. She gave piano lessons and was organist at St. Michael's church. The churches were separate livings at that time.

27. Next came the butcher's shop, kept by Mr. R. W. Austin. He had a tenor voice and sang in the choir and he was another tradesman who was a member of the parish council. Later he retired and the business was taken over by Mr. W. J. Utting.

28. The Post Office came next, a plain and austere looking house. The room on the right-hand side facing was the Post Office and entered via the front door and hall. It was a Sub Post Office only. The postmaster was Mr. Herbert Rudd, assisted by his sister, Lydia. They were very nice people and were joined later by their nephew, Donald K. Chapman, who took over the Post Office when Mr. Rudd died. After the War, the premises were enlarged, and a new shop front was added. Mr. Chapman, assisted by his two sisters, then expanded the business with stationery and tobacco, etc.

29. Ivy House, the next facing north, was a pretty house covered with ivy, looking more imposing against the plain exterior of the houses either side. Privately, the Gibbs thought theirs was prettier since it was covered with Virginia creeper which turned red in the autumn, but Ivy House had the advantage of keeping its leaves all the year round. A succession of relieving officers lived here, Whitelaw, Hammond and Lindsey. I cannot remember if there was a tenant in between Lindsey and Mrs. Wilton, who had a large family and two lodgers. Her husband had been a sergeant major, and they first kept the Star Inn at Whitwell. After his death, Mrs. Wilton came into the town. She was a character indeed, with a strong personality. She was most

intelligent, hard-working, public spirited and a singer, altogether a very busy woman, but she always had time for everything and everybody. When the telephone came to Reepham, she managed the exchange installed in Ivy House, the porch being used as the call office. It was said that she liked to listen in to conversations, but I cannot vouch for any truth in this gossip. After the War when some of the family were grown up, she moved across the road to the old reading room which had been occupied by troops during the War and the telephone exchange moved with her.

30. My very early recollection of the Sun Inn facing north and also facing Gibbs' shop (and attached to Ivy House) was of "Charlie Culling", the dog, so named because Mr. Culling was the landlord. I think someone else followed him for a short time, but then came Mr. and Mrs. Fred Watson and they were landlords there for a number of years. Mr. Watson was a most efficient painter and decorator and worked for Mr. John Wright who lived in Norwich Road. Mr. Watson continued with his work for some years but later gave it up to work entirely in the Sun. Mrs. Watson was a woman of great character, and very much respected by all her customers. She was a kind, motherly soul and during the War was known to the forces as "ma". She was extremely good to all service men, whether Army, Navy and Air Force, especially if they were home sick or lonely.

*Marjorie Gibbs*

*From an article published in the Reepham Society Newsletter, Christmas 1985*



REEPHAM MARKET PLACE TODAY - NAMED

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BEFORE AND DURING THE 1914-18 WAR -

NUMBERED

MARKET PLACE

CHURCH HILL

BACK STREET

TOWNS END CORNER

JOHNSONS (LAST OFFICE)  
←17→ ←18→ ←19→

GLEN HOBBS  
←16→

DOUGES STORES  
←21→ ←20→

22. JOHNSONS WOOL AND FASHIONS  
HENKES HOSE

23. BIRCHAM CENTRE.

←14→ ←15→ ←16→  
OLD BREWERY HOUSE HOTEL.  
13.

←24→  
KINGS ARMS P.H.  
←25→

11. THE CHIMES.

10. AFTERFIELD BUTCHERS

9. BARCLAYS BANK.  
14. THEN 5+6+7 AND THEN 8.

DIANES PANTRY  
FAST BAIT PRESS  
LANDJ. BUNNIE  
YOUNG AND GOOTIFULL

26.

RUDY AND HOLLY

29.

1. PETER GEORGE LEISURE FIVINGS

30. FORMER SUN P.H.

GRIEFS.

REEPHAM D.I.C.