

## 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 known 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 Brigadier 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.

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The Norwich Road entrance to the Ollands Estate.