

Blacksmiths' workshops and yards in Reepham

*By Janet Archer*

The June photo in the Reepham Life 2021 Calendar shows two farriers at the blacksmiths on the corner of Ollands Road and Malthouse Lane, Reepham. It is thought the two men are Walter Rudd and his brother, and that the photograph was taken in the 1930s.



Reepham, like most towns and villages in the 18th and 19th century, had its share of blacksmiths' workshops and yards, where horses could be shod, and wagons and carriages repaired. Larger workshops, like Eglington & Gooch, which existed on the site of the current Spar shop in Ollands Road, would employ a variety of skilled workmen, the blacksmith and his forge, carpenters and wheelwrights and, of course, a farrier for the specialised skill of shoeing horses.



*Above: Employees of Eglington & Gooch, c.1910*

Working closely with horses being shod means that a farrier needs knowledge of the anatomy of a horse and to be able to spot signs of infection or damage in the hoof or leg. Consequently, specialist farriers were often veterinary surgeons, and their work also involved the welfare of cattle and sheep.

A horse also needs to be shod appropriately according to its size and role, such as hauling a cart on roads, pulling a plough across a field or being ridden for leisure.

It is not surprising to find a public house next door to, or included within, a smithy, and in Reepham there are records, dating back to White's Directory of 1832, showing the existence of a public house or beer house called the Farriers Arms, also known as the Horse Shoes.



*Above: Eglington & Gooch's yard with houses in foreground, once the home of Robert Parker Gooch and, nearest the foreground, the Farriers Arms, both now demolished.*

Thomas Grand had the licence from the 1830s until Robert Parker Gooch took it over in the 1850s. A sale advertisement from the Norfolk Chronicle in 1835 indicates that a blacksmith's and farrier's trade had been in existence for some time before that.

From the reports of a licensing meeting in 1906, Sidney Eglington, representing his grandfather, said that Robert had had a licence for 55 years and would find it hard to give it up. If the magistrates granted a licence a wholesale trade would continue to be carried on, as it was formerly.

Superintendent Palmer was asked for a report and replied that he had measured the distance between all the various public houses in the town. He said that there was more trade done in the market now than when the witness was stationed there 13 years ago, and it was not uncommon for there to be 50 carts at the King's Arms on a Wednesday.

To the best of his knowledge no excise licence had been taken out for 19 years. The licence renewal was refused in June 1906.

*Information from Fifteen Locals by Joyce Cox; Norfolk News, 3 March 1906; norfolkpubs.co.uk*