

Reepham Market

Reepham Market was founded in 1277 when Sir John de Vaux, whose lordship of Hackford extended into the parish of Reepham, obtained a charter from Edward I for a weekly market on Saturday and a fair on “the eve of day and morrow” of the feasts of Saint Peter and Paul – the 29th June.

This fair was for many centuries one of the highlights of the year to people living in and around Reepham. At the turn of this century the Market Place would be invaded by travellers’ vans, roundabouts, coconut shies, shooting galleries and stalls selling all manner of sweets, rock, souvenirs and general cheapjack items. Such a large gathering of fair people lasted longer than the original charter condition of an evening and a day and usually they were here for at least a week, with some of the last to leave taking up to three weeks. Although the fair offered a time of great delight and excitement to the children, the adult part of the population was glad when they went owing to the noise, disruption and general inconvenience that was caused. Edward Gibbs, the ironmonger, once gave credit to one of the Norwich fairground families for the supply of a quantity of paint so that the “cakewalk” could be repainted while it was at Reepham. The fair moved on, the bill was not settled and for years afterwards the annual visit of the fair meant an attempt by Mr Gibbs to obtain his money. It is said that he never was successful in receiving payment.

This annual fair occupied the whole area of the Market Place; the vans (or homes) of the fair people were drawn up side by side outside the King’s Arms with the horses being put out to grass on a meadow near the outskirts of the town. The various rides were placed on the remainder of the area and at night the whole scene would come alive with a blaze of sound, light and colour. There was a large and majestic steam engine which provided the power to run the roundabouts, the organ with its wide repertoire of tunes and to provide lighting for some of the stalls. All the stalls were gaily or gaudily decorated and those not lit from the steam engine were illuminated by paraffin flares.

It was an annual occasion that was greatly looked forward to. It brought life and vibrancy to the town and temporarily increased the takings of many of the local businesses, particularly the public houses. In these present times our children clamour for a trip to a theme park but in those past days the thrill, entertainment and overall fun of the fair made its way to Reepham and doubtless this once a year event was appreciated, enjoyed and remembered far more than the expensive outings of today.

The fair was held on the Market Place up to the outbreak of the Second World War. From 1939 the limitations imposed on the fair people by the war made such events impossible. Although visits by fair people resumed in the late 1940s and continued until the 1960s, they were on a much smaller scale and the stalls and rides were moved from the Market Place to a field on the outskirts of the town. The size and grandeur of the fairs of these earlier years had gone forever. While this annual fair gave Reepham a week or more of local supremacy, the dominance of a market in this area of Norfolk was for many years with the neighbouring town of Foulsham. Around 1300, Foulsham was the metropolis of the Eynsford Hundred and

for at least the next three centuries the Reepham market was not to be compared with that of its neighbour.

Market Day

However, the size and status of Foulsham slowly declined while at the same time Reepham steadily prospered and during the 18th and 19th centuries established itself as a typical market town. With a population of about 1,000 in 1845 it had acquired, apart from its Market Place, a number of activities which distinguished it from a “village”. These would have included a bank, several inns, a brewery, clock and watch maker, chemist, grocer and draper, coach builder and stone mason.

For generations, until it finally closed in the early 1970s, the farmers of the neighbourhood looked to Reepham to provide a weekly market for their products. The original market was set up in mediaeval times and this allowed a convergence on Reepham of all manner of people who wanted to buy, sell or barter and the market would also have offered a type of “employment bureau” where arrangements could be made to hire a craftsman’s skills. For instance, a carpenter would have lived in the town or he may have come in and set up a stall from which he would take orders or arrange work. He would then go to carry out the arranged work in the house of the person who wanted furniture made. This type of service would have been the same for many other trades such as bricklayers or builders, dressmakers and tailors.

With the large influx of people for this particular day the town would have had to make specific arrangements, water had to be available and the requirements were probably satisfied by communal wells or by the town pond which was situated where the fire station stands today. The stalls would have been organised into fixed lines with passages between and market latrines would have been dug; in the winter cut reeds or old straw would have been spread about on the roadways to soak up the mud and rain. Special beer was often brewed and bread would have been baked for the refreshment of those attending.

Market Day in those times would have been a difficult experience for the many who attended. The main street (now Back Street) would have been narrow and hold-ups would inevitably be caused by the traffic passing through. This moved at different speeds – there were riders on horseback, singly or in groups, horse-drawn carts of different sizes and probably slow, solid bullock carts, swaying and moving at a walking pace or less. There would have been piles of stinking street rubbish to negotiate, children playing, stray animals and many a drunk unintentionally sleeping in the gutter. Parking of animals and carts was a problem and the length of parking time was much disputed. Although this was probably the manner of Market Day in Reepham for centuries it became somewhat more organised in later years and particularly during the 19th century. By this time, the familiar layout of the centre of Reepham that we have today had been built. Back Street was no longer the main thoroughfare and the roads leading into the town would have allowed a much easier passage for those wishing to travel through on Market Day.

In 1845 Reepham is recorded as having a hiring fair; this was one of the many customs associated with the farming year which had prevailed for centuries but which like so many

others died out during the early part of the 20th century. Towards the end of September the hiring fair would have been held and those agricultural workers who wanted to “break fresh ground” would gather in the Market Place wearing a piece of coloured ribbon or cord in their buttonhole. This was a sign that they were seeking a new situation. When the labourer had agreed terms with a farmer, he would accept a shilling (usually) and this would bind him to serve his new employer for a year. While St Michaelmas day is officially the 29th September, in this area the payment of all due rents and the various necessary farm movements would become effective on the 11th October. New farm engagements would commence on this date and should the labourer have defaulted then the farmer was entitled to sue him. Although considering the wages offered and the limited possessions of the labourer this was not much of an option to the farmer. It is further recorded in 1845 that Reepham had a weekly market, which sold stock from within a wide catchment area. What isn't known is the date when the day of the weekly market changed from Saturday to Wednesday although it had been held on Wednesdays since at least the early 1800s.

It was with the coming of the railways in the mid 19th century that the movement to market for both man and beast became easier. While this transport change initially benefited Reepham, the drawing power of the great market in Norwich, with its need to feed a large population, gradually stifled all the smaller markets that offered competition. Although competition with Norwich was never something that was particularly appropriate from the much smaller local markets like Reepham, it was a major element that contributed towards the eventual closure of the Reepham saleground in March 1972.

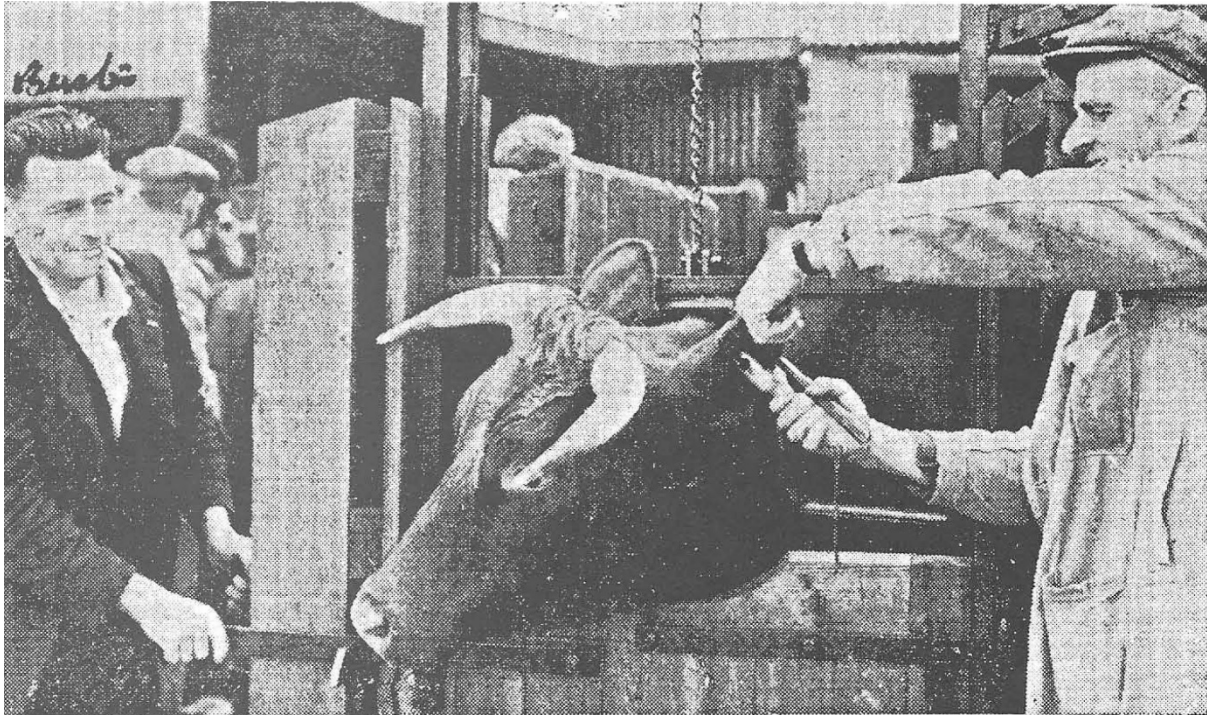
Until the setting up of the new market saleground by Irelands in 1877, the Wednesday market is recorded as being a corn and cattle market with the 29th June as the annual fair for stock and horses. Little is recorded of the corn market and it was probably a small affair compared to the much larger ones held elsewhere in the county. The indoor facilities of the Corn Hall in Exchange Street, Norwich (now the home of Jarrolds Department Store) were palatial indeed compared to the open Market Place at Reepham which subjected the buyers and sellers to the vagaries of the weather.

Corn and Cattle

The corn market would commence in the autumn once the grain to be sold became available on the local farms. With harvest over and the barns full the threshing would begin; in the 19th century this was a boring, arduous task, carried out by four or five men at a time who would use a flail, the tool that was like a wooden jointed whip which when used in a steady rhythmic way would shake out the individual grains of com.

After threshing was completed, the “winnowing” or “dressing” of the corn would be carried out and the remaining grain was scooped up into “bushels” – the standard measure, levelled off and tipped into sacks. Grain would be taken straight to the mills after dressing or samples would be taken to the market so that it could be sold. “Stock and staple” were the terms given to the types of corn sales; “staple” or “sample” was when the farmer would bring samples of his corn and book the order; he would then arrange delivery where and when required and then collect payment. This would save cartage in bad weather, an important

consideration on the bad winter roads prevalent in this agricultural area at that time. "Stock" was when the farmer took the corn in sacks to sell direct, collecting payment at once. This method of sale often favoured the buyer as he would try and beat down the price, knowing the farmer would let all go cheaply, rather than have to cart the corn home again.



Earmarked – A Red Lincoln steer receives his ear mark, necessary under the fat stock subsidy scheme, at Reepham cattle market. The "operation" is being performed by Mr L. Blythe, July 1954.

During the 1880s there was obviously a good demand for grain in this area and a number of local businesses were actively involved in the buying and selling. There was Bircham & Sons who purchased for their brewery, William Hannant and George Wright, both corn dealers, Squirrell and Utting, corn and cake merchants, S & S W Leeds, corn and seed merchants, and Coller & Sons, coal and corn merchants. Three of these businesses were established at Reepham Station and the coming of the railway to Reepham at this time boosted the local corn market, albeit only for a few years. There was an initial spirit of optimism as the following letter placed in the local press in November 1882 indicates:

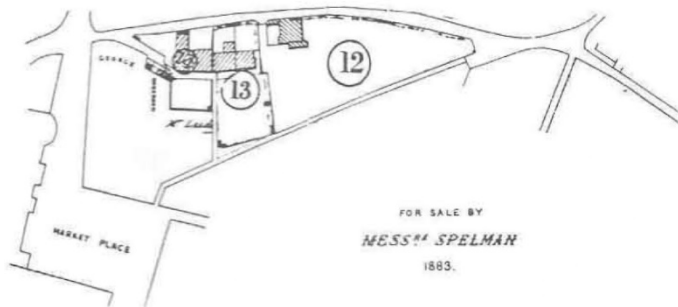
The reopening of this market took place on the 4th October 1882 and has continued every fortnight since with remarkable success quite beyond the most sanguine expectations. The next market will be held on Wednesday at half past two (instead of half past three as therefore) at which time a train will arrive at Reepham Station (Great Eastern Railway) and those coming from Norwich and elsewhere will find a conveyance ready to take them into the market. The principal buyers have consented to find sacks and do all they can to make the delivery to sellers of corn bought at this market as easy

for the farmers as possible at the railway station nearest. Seeing there is every facility and good prospect of making a good corn market for the neighbourhood, the farmers are solicited to support this project in every way they possibly can. We are expecting a full attendance at the next market.

Your obedient servant, R P Gooch

Reepham Auction Mart

Messrs. Irelands saleyard, an area that was to become an integral part of Reepham's prosperity was originally an orchard. It was the property of William Bircham who owned the Reepham Brewery (now the Old Brewery House Hotel), various areas of land in and around Reepham and a number of public houses, including the King's Arms. The orchard, which for a number of years had been let to the landlord of this establishment, was triangular in shape and is recorded in the subsequent Bircham Estate sale catalogue as occupying an area of 2 rods and 13 perches. It was obtained from Michaelmas 1878 on a 30-year lease by Messrs. Irelands at an annual rental of £5. The orchard also contained a small barn with a yard and sheds and these continued to be let to the King's Arms at the annual rental of £7.10s.0d. The orchard had been leased for development as a cattle saleyard and it was subsequently advertised by Irelands as the Reepham Auction Mart. In summer 1883 the Bircham Estate was put up for sale by public auction and the 16 lots were sold at the Norfolk Hotel in Norwich. Lot 12, comprising the auction mart and the barn, were purchased outright by Irelands.



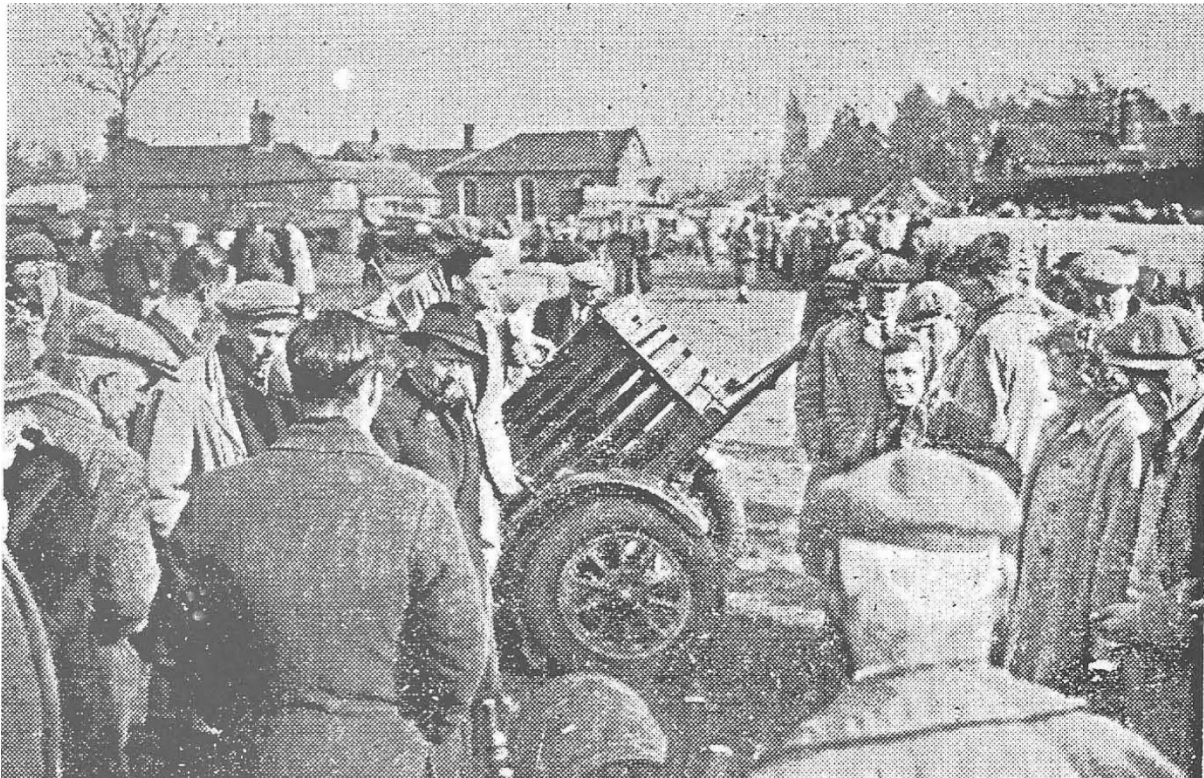
In 1883 cattle were still being sold on the Market Place although Irelands' fortnightly sale is recorded as a "large stock sale". A notice in the *Eastern Daily Press* for a fortnightly sale in July 1883 informed interested parties:

Messrs. Irelands offer for sale at Reepham Auction Mart

PRIME FAT BULLOCKS, COWS, HEIFERS, STORE STOCK, FAT SHEEP, HOGGETS. FAT AND STORE PIGS and OTHER EFFECTS.

Commencing at 12.30 P.M.

It is unclear as to whether local competition was prevalent between buyers and sellers in the Market Place and the new saleyard but Irelands would appear to have established the major level of business.



This picture, a study in expressions, was taken during Messrs. Ireland's sale at Reepham on Wednesday 22nd March 1950.

War and Depression

At the outbreak of the First World War the selling of cattle still continued on the Market Place; Irelands had become a weekly sale with the annual fair still taking place from 29th June. The 1914–18 war and the resulting period of depression which greatly affected agriculture in this area severely altered these arrangements and by 1925 the annual fair was no longer recorded. With one or two notable exceptions all market and sale activities had been moved to Irelands' saleyard and they took place on a weekly basis.

The outbreak of war in 1914 did not immediately change the pattern of agricultural life in this area with the harvest of that year being brought in before farm workers of military age began to trickle away to join the "great adventure". The greatest threat was the requisitioning of farm horses by government agents with many a local farmer losing good stock to provide the army with the means to haul the artillery and above all for transport. Although the weekly market continued, this loss was the cause of great inconvenience to many farmers who relied upon horses as their only mode of transport.

With bad harvests in 1915 and 1916 and with the continued success of the German U-boat campaign, the government acted and set up a Food Production Department which had wide powers to purchase domestic produce and agricultural products. Many items which would have been disposed of through the system of the local markets prior to the war were now purchased direct and the market as a vital element of the local economy began to decline.

This decline was compounded further when, after another difficult harvest in 1917, rationing of food was introduced. The farming industry was able overall to make a positive contribution to the war effort and farmers did rather well from August 1917 when an Act was passed which was initially to guarantee minimum cereal prices for the next six years and also introduced a minimum wage for farm workers. This however was repealed in 1921 and prices and wages fell sharply.

The 1920s is recalled as being the most depressing period for farming, a depression which in turn affected those areas of business which relied heavily upon it. Market prices that had been high during the war years plummeted, the price of cereals fell so sharply that profits could only be gained by farmers who worked the best land and could produce a high yield. The introduction in 1919 of death duties on large estates meant that a great deal of land was placed on the market. Land values were still high and during this post-war period there were huge sales. It was estimated that by 1921 more than one quarter of all local farm acreage had changed hands. The auctioneers suddenly found a short-term boom for their services in dealing with the many land sales that occurred.

These high prices failed to last and from the early 1920s the state of farming generally went into a sharp decline, farm prices fell sharply and farmers dismissed their workers and tried to make ends meet by using family labour, machinery or by reducing standards and grassing over previously arable land. Many farms were sold as the owners went bankrupt and landlords of large acreages found the land could not be let at any price. The wages of farm workers which had reached 46/- a week in 1918 had now been eroded down to 19/- a week; there was no alternative to these labourers but to work at the low rates as many men were already out of work due to the high number of farm closures.

The period from a farm workers strike at the Easter time of 1923 until the General Strike in 1926 is seen as the lowest point in these bad times but after this date things began to slowly pick up. During the war, the government had introduced the new crop of sugar beet, ironically as Germany had supplied 80% of Britain's pre-war demand for this crop. From the mid-1920s the government gave the farming industry a much greater financial backing by offering a contract price for growing this root crop. It helped to get the farmers back to a healthier state by giving a level of financial security coupled with a crop that assisted crop rotation. Previously farmers had grown mangolds, swedes and turnips which were a root crop to feed cattle with. The import of cheap beef particularly from the Americas undercut the market price of cattle raised in this country. Farmers could not afford to keep them and in turn they no longer grew the root crops required as fodder. The lack of animals to sell meant a severe reduction in trade for the local markets and the auctioneers.

The introduction of subsidies on wheat and also on slag and lime greatly helped. Many fields in this area had become sour and underproductive. They needed liming to increase yields, basic slag (which is a phosphatic fertiliser) was sent from the coalfields by train to Reepham. It was delivered to the nearby farms and spread onto the fields.

Among those who survived the depression were farmers who were able to rear or support a flock of sheep and to many farmers the yearly cheque for lambs was the largest single item

in their annual income. While many locally raised sheep were sent to the large sales in Norfolk such as the June lamb sale at Diss (the largest in East Anglia), there was still a large number sold in Reepham. An annual spring lamb sale was held by Irelands at Briston, an event which coincided with the local fair. However this sale, like the sale of sheep at Reepham, did not have the pulling power and higher prices of markets like Diss. Sheep driven to the fair at Diss attracted buyers from far afield and these buyers were prepared to pay higher prices than those that could be expected in Reepham.



There was a wholesale improvement in farming from 1936 onwards, but the results of the worst times were felt right up to the outbreak of war in 1939 and it was generally felt that the land fit for the returning heroes of the First World War did not materialise under the wide Norfolk sky.

Animals have always been sent to market; the buying and selling of beasts and fowls has always been an integral part of farming life, and profit and fortune were only to be had if a farmer was able to raise his stock to a standard which commanded a good price. Until the latter part of the last century many animals would have been driven to the local market although some were often driven longer distances to the larger or seasonal markets as better prices could be obtained. The demand of the Norwich and King's Lynn markets and the annual sheep sales at selected towns throughout the county would mean long days for the drovers who were entrusted to take care of the animals being sold or bought. However, the time and effort taken by the local farmers and the hired drovers would generally be well rewarded by the higher prices obtained.

First the Railways then the Cattle Floats

Reepham had for many centuries enjoyed a standard rural catchment for those who attended its weekly market, the numbers attending as with most rural areas was limited to the daily journey made possible by horse and cart, a distance of some four or five miles (or a ten-mile round trip). Initially, Reepham gained a shift in importance with the coming of the

railways, with two lines and two stations positioned at the north and south of the town. Farmers from a wider area were able to buy and sell stock and for a number of years, particularly up to the First World War, the market prospered.

However, from the 1920s this prosperity, brought to Reepham by the railways, declined as more and more trade was switched to the more lucrative Norwich Saturday market with the loading of mostly cattle onto the early trains from Whitwell and Reepham stations and then being unloaded at the Trowse and City stations in Norwich and driven through the streets to the Castle Hill market.

This mode of transport slowly began to change as more and more farmers started to use the competitive cattle lorries of the hauliers for their market transport. The old order of the farmers, the local markets and the cattle drovers, all reliant upon each other for so long, were to be so radically changed in just a few years by the transport changes that accelerated during the second half of the 20th century.

The cattle lorries took the trade from the railways and the trade went to the larger markets or direct to the abattoir. The cattle drover had all but disappeared by the 1940s, the railways closed during the next 20 years and many of the smaller and more local markets had gone by the mid 1970s.

Reepham Stock Mart (as it was originally known) reached its peak during the years 1900–1914, when it was among the best in the county, with local people adamant that it was only inferior to the larger markets on Norwich Castle Hill and at King's Lynn. It served faithfully and well a wide inland agricultural community – with the nearest opposition as far distant as Dereham, Fakenham, Holt, North Walsham and Norwich – and weekly entries of 200 cattle in addition to plentiful supplies of sheep, pigs and poultry were of quite common occurrence.

Beasts and Drovers

Animals would be brought in by a mixture of boys, farm labourers and drovers. The former two would have driven animals from the local farms or from the two railway stations while the drovers would have come from some distance where it was impractical to use rail transport. The driven animals would low and bellow as they had always done, mostly moved in slow but seemingly organised groups. Occasionally an animal would bolt from the herd or flock but this would quickly gain the attention of the drover's dog, which would increase the noise level as they barked and chased the animal back into place. While the drovers could exercise tight control with their charges, this was not always so with the groups of animals that were being led, even short distances, by some of the local lads. On shorter journeys that were not worth the bother for a drover the farmers would sometimes get their labourers to drive animals to market. Some farmers were reluctant to do this as they felt that the labourers were having a morning out at their expense, so they paid some of the local lads a few pence to do this particular job – a decision not popular with the labourers but the farmers felt it was money well spent. While this offered a financially prudent arrangement to the farmer, he tended to turn a blind eye to the difficulties that the lads often encountered or unwittingly caused.

A small herd of young pigs would want to go in every direction except forwards and certainly not on the most direct route to the sale pen. A sudden noise would send the frightened animals scurrying in all directions; if an open garden gate or a gap in the hedge was discovered many a Reepham resident ended the day with an upturned flower bed or a vegetable crop dug up earlier than was intended. After the market it was a similar story but in reverse; if a farmer had bought animals and wanted them taken home by an experienced hand, he would seek out one of the drover brethren and arrange for "Jimma" with his "ol dorg" to go across and take the animals to their destination. If a shorter journey was involved the local boys would still be willing, despite their early morning problems.

A local drover was Sidney Frost who lived in Whitwell Street, a man who was renowned for his large size and his infrequent change of clothing, although this was blamed on his droving which often meant many days at a time away from home. With his dog trailing beside him he would be at the Acle marshes by 4 am to receive cattle which were then walked back to be in Reepham by sundown ready for delivery to the saleground for the following day's market.

During the latter part of the 19th century and the early years of this century large numbers of Irish cattle were sent over to be sold initially at Norwich market. The cattle were landed on the west coast and then sent by rail to Norwich. Local drovers were employed to receive and if necessary to look after the cattle for a few days and then to bring them to the market for sale. Irish cattle were very popular at Norwich because they were ideally suited for the lush coastal marshes. They would be sold and then sent to the marshes for fattening up, the rich grazing ensured they were ready for sale again after about three months.

The cattle would be brought off the marshes by the marshmen ready to meet drovers like Sidney Frost, who then had the slow but steady task of walking them to a local market. The Irish cattle were often in a bad state when they arrived in Norwich. They had lived very poorly in Ireland and some of them were in a wild state, often the drives to the marshes were very difficult for the drovers and a great test for their skills. Once this difficult task had been achieved the cattle thrived quickly and the long return journey to markets like Reepham was much easier with a bunch of fat and contented beasts.

After the First World War the work of the drover was gradually but irretrievably taken over by the motorised cattle float; although in the early years the size of the vehicles was small and the number of animals that could be carried was limited, they were obviously much quicker and the services of the drover and his dog, who had been part of the local agricultural life for so long, soon became obsolete. In later years, the cattle floats would be brought into the saleyard, reversed up to the pens and the animals would be loaded up for a journey to their new home or on their final journey to the abattoir. The animals with a degree of initial reluctance, would anxiously climb the boards with the lorry driver and yard helpers banging empty pails on the sides of the lorry to encourage the hesitating beasts along. The shrill yap-yap-yap of the drover's dog had now been replaced by the sounds of grinding gears and labouring engines. The old order of centuries had changed. Although most of the drovers stuck to their known trade some of them would buy and sell for dealers and butchers and eventually some moved fully into the dealing business when the old order changed.

Some animals would be brought in by other means. One or two horses would be harnessed to pull a cattle float which would hold two beasts, pigs would be put into the back of a tumbril and then covered over with a net and nearly all the poultry was put into crates which were conveyed in the back of a farmer's trap or driving cart. Billy Easton, landlord of the Ratcatchers public house at Cawston, was typical of many at that time who dabbled in the ways of the market by buying and selling poultry and small stock. He would journey into Reepham every Wednesday with his horse and cart and would have two or three crates of chickens and perhaps some rabbits to sell. After a day at the saleground he would go home with some other poultry, which had been bought at an advantageous price, ready to sell at a higher price a week or two later.

In those days everyone in this rural area kept chickens, mostly for the eggs but also for the kitchen pot. When the birds had finished laying, they would be disposed of. There were no household freezers for the birds to go to so they would be sent to the local market and sold. There were large numbers of poultry sold at Reepham each week with most of the purchasing carried out by specialist poultry dealers. A number of dealers came each week from Briston, Hevingham and Norwich but there was also the regular attendance of buyers from further afield and particularly those who purchased for the meat trade in the Jewish areas of East London. After having been sold the birds destined for the dinner tables of Bethnal Green and Shoreditch would be put into crates and pushed on a hand cart up to Reepham Station; they were then packed in the guard's van and sent to Norwich ready to catch a late afternoon train to London.

Market Day and the Public Houses

There were a diverse number of people who regularly attended Reepham Market Day. Local buyers and butchers were joined by many from Norwich and other East Anglian towns. There were also Midlands buyers and some coming from as far north as Manchester. These long-distance buyers would travel to a number of local markets until they had purchased all their requirements. Attendance at Reepham on Wednesdays would be followed by a journey to Acle on the following day.

Added to these were the drovers who have already been mentioned and of course the farmers, butchers and dealers, who reached the town in a variety of carts, traps and even occasionally the elegant gig. The horses were taken out of the shafts and stabled under the watchful control of "Duckety" Rudd at the King's Arms or Billy Hall at The Sun and these two hostelries in the Market Place did a thriving business while bargains were driven and settlements made. Some farmers preferred the lesser hostelries such as the Lord Nelson, Greyhound, Duke of York or George and Dragon. In this pre-motor car era, the caring for the horses and storing of carts gave much opportunity to the rival ostlers, whose frequent encroachment beyond their own bounds upon the frontages of residences and other business establishments often grew to dimensions which presented quite a problem.

Another popular place was The Crown, mainly due to its proximity to Reepham Station and the roads leading buyers and sellers in from Holt, Cawston, Aylsham and Wood Dalling. This particular public house was open all day and would pick up a lot of business during the

afternoon as farmers, butchers and various other traders made their way up to catch a train home or were journeying past by horse and trap or on foot. During this later part of the day many had already imbibed at the public houses in the town and were often a little worse for drink. Memories still exist locally of some of the Briston dealers who regularly made their way home in an intoxicated and fighting state and who would stop and have “one for the road” at The Crown. Some local businesses were indeed cautious and Hunts Stores on Station Plain would often lock their shop doors until these particular dealers had passed by.

In the centre of the town, farmers would congregate and talk to each other, exchange news and gossip and bargain with the merchants to sell their corn or go to the bank for wages. They would take the opportunity to carry out necessary farm shopping with visits to the ironmongers or the agricultural engineer. Their wives would come too and would make their way around the shops, market traders and cheapjacks drawn in by the one day of the week when everyone came to buy and sell. A horse-drawn Sainsbury’s van was a regular feature before the First World War. It would be based in the Market Place and would buy eggs brought in by the farmers’ wives; these women also brought in and sold farm-made butter to the local shopkeepers.

Many of those attending would return to the hostelry of their choice to invest some of their profit in the liquid refreshment available. The local public houses were open from 10 am to 10 pm and both The Sun and the King’s Arms enjoyed considerable trade. There were the early drinkers who had taken advantage of the relaxed market day times, the farm hands who had brought in or were to take home animals and then there were the farmers, butchers, dealers and other traders. Later in the day, after all trading had been concluded, the auctioneers and their staff would arrive. They all came to eat, drink, strike deals, catch up on the gossip and converse with their friends and acquaintances. The bars would be full and the beer would flow and many would contend that although market day was primarily business, the best part was undoubtedly the socialising which took place after the organised buying and selling had been completed. The day would conclude with many people heading home in a befuddled but contented state.

The market thrived during the pre-war years but with the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 and its subsequent restrictions it entered upon a general decline from which it never recovered. The heights of the sales during the Edwardian era were never again achieved and the slow decline continued during the next 60 years. There were periods of re-establishment, notably in the late 1930s – when the Hitler War cried a halt – and again in the early/mid 1950s after the limitations of the Second World War were finally lifted.

Until the introduction towards the second half of this century of the larger and monopolistic abattoirs, all killing of animals was carried out by butchers at local slaughter houses. Reepham butchers like Pratt, Utting and Spriggs all bought animals at the market, kept them until required and then carried out the slaughtering. Mondays was the quiet day of the week for the local butchery trade so the fateful animals were dispatched on this day.

Food Rationing and Other Controls

The market continued during the years of the Second World War but the sale of the majority of the animals was strictly controlled by the government. After the introduction and general success of the scheme of rationing in the First World War, the government felt that this would be an essential element of their war programme. It was decided in the first week of war in September 1939 that food rationing would inevitably come, but for the time being food production was to be controlled so that food supplies available would be well looked after and evenly distributed.

This early control was an attempt to prevent anything like profiteering and to avoid a dislocation of food stocks. Controls were introduced on Wednesday 13 September 1939 with an order made for fixing maximum prices for fat cattle, calves and sheep primarily destined for slaughter. While it was possible to sell poultry and young pigs to the highest market bidder it meant overall that the sale of animals had to be carried out through the local livestock market and direct sales from the farm were prohibited.



The controls, in various forms of intensity, lasted for the next 15 years although the first few months of the “phoney war” caused the government to lift the restrictions in December and for a short time the market reverted back to a normal state. However, with the initial introduction of the controls, many farmers had assumed that with a market of fixed prices it would not pay for them to retain beasts for fattening and many beasts had been disposed of at control prices during the previous three months. Though the shortage pushed up Christmas prices that year it was a simple fact that local farmers had received no encouragement to hold on to their animals as they usually did for the Christmas trade and the relaxation of controls was short-lived.

During the early years of the war there was pressure from the government to put as much extra land as possible “under the plough”. Millions of extra acres were planted with cereals and although this compensated the levels of foodstuffs that could no longer be imported it had an initial and drastic effect on farmers who kept livestock. There was tremendous propaganda pressure from the Ministry of Food, who seemed to have an insatiable bias for more potatoes, to plough up more land and there was an argument that one acre of average arable crops fed far more of the population than one acre of average grassland. It was widely promoted that an acre of average wheat saved at least as much shipping space as seven acres of the best grass in England. Farmers who had kept livestock before the war had relied increasingly on cheap imported feeding stuffs; these were no longer available and those locally produced were all strictly rationed. This coupled with the subsidised plough-up policy caused many animals to be sold and slaughtered during the autumn and winter of 1940/41. This resulted in a severe decrease in the keeping of animals and particularly of poultry and pigs which gave little back to the soil in return for what they ate, and by 1943 the output of eggs had fallen by half and that of pigmeat by two-thirds below the pre-war level.



The camera catches the atmosphere of the market as the crowds gather around the auctioneers, some to bid and buy, some just to watch and listen.

While this had an initial drastic effect on livestock there was a need to maintain a balance as British farming at that time was essentially mixed. It was appreciated that to reduce too much would affect the level of meat and milk production and there was an effort to retain fat cattle and fat pigs, prices would be guaranteed and the production and sale would be strictly controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. After 1940 all purchases of livestock for slaughter were made on the government account, farmers were asked to maintain orderly

marketing of stock in the normal quantities through the appointed market and to co-operate with the various stages of control as they were introduced through the war years.

Reepham was nominated as a market that could grade cattle and pigs and for the next few years, until the regulations were finally decontrolled in 1954, the regular Wednesday sale day continued.

Grading

When the animals were sent to market they were no longer sold by auction. The stock would be sent in by the local farmers and inspectors from the Ministry of Agriculture would grade the animals, although in the early part of the war some of the grading was often carried out by experienced local butchers and farmers like Thomas Hudson of Bawdeswell. The animals would be weighed and checked and the decision of the grading fixed by means of an ear tag. The resulting grade would determine the price the farmer received. The controls would also determine the particular butcher or slaughter house to which the animals were to be sent. Grading at Reepham would start at 10 am and would usually take up to three hours to complete.

While the animals were sent to market it was a very controlled procedure and somewhat alien to many farmers who had always been used to the ways of a more open sale environment and to those who had been used to selling animals direct from the farm to local dealers and butchers. There was also a level of resentment to the Ministry officials who would sometimes grade animals to a lower price than that expected by an individual farmer. However much the system of control was disliked it allowed Reepham Market to remain open during these dark years even though it had become no more than a local point for the control of basic food production. The number of people, particularly farmers, who attended the market declined during these war years. Unless a farmer had animals to buy or sell, he did not go – times were hard, fuel was rationed, there was much to do and few people to do it and no time for standing about socialising in Reepham saleyard.



Dealers

An essential element contributing to the local market system was the role of the dealer. They were men who were mainly farmers or who had access to land upon which they would graze or store cattle until such time as the animals could be profitably sold. These men would travel around the various daily markets in Norfolk and beyond, buying and selling animals although they dealt primarily in cattle.



Prospective buyers Mr G. Childerhouse and Mr F. E. Falmer, inspecting geese at the Christmas poultry sale, Tuesday 14 December 1965.

The buying and selling would not, however, always be carried out at the saleground. In Reepham the various dealers would be found in their usual seat at a favoured hostelry and many a deal was struck between them and their customers without the help of the auctioneers. One of these exceptions was "Latcher" Woodhouse, a cattle dealer who lived near Aylsham. He would never sell through Ireland's market but always sold his animals privately so as to avoid having to pay commission to the middle-man. He would drive over to Reepham in a pony and trap and the 15–20 cattle that he had for sale would be brought in by a local drover. He would position himself (and the animals) near the outside railings of the Brewery House and from here conduct his business, a manner of sale that he continued throughout the inter-war years.

Edward de Grey Seaman had extensive farming interests locally at Foulsham, Kerdiston and further afield at King's Lynn. He would always sit in the King's Arms and conduct his business with the aid of a pot of tea which was constantly refilled during the dealing between him and his customers. John Perowne, who farmed at Brandiston, could always be found in The Sun, and Fords the bakers in the Market Place was the usual haunt of Sam Pye who had butchers' shops at Cawston and Swaffham. Deals here were often concluded over a cup of tea and a hot meat pie or a plate of "hollow" biscuits.

During the depressed years of the 20s and 30s many farmers lacked the finance to buy cattle but had the land to graze them on, so they would come to an arrangement with a dealer. Young cattle would be bought by the dealer and then fattened and looked after by the farmer; when ready the dealer would sell the cattle and a financial settlement from the profit would be shared between the two of them. Many small farmers during this period had no alternative but to seek out the dealers on market day and to try and set up such an arrangement, a deal that would give the farmer a small but greatly needed level of income.

There were also buyers like Fred Wright who purchased for the Norwich Co-op Society and Billy Brooks of Horsford and Hubert Large of Swanton Morley who bought for slaughter houses who in turn supplied the butchery trade. There were many local butchers who bought for their own shops; Sam Pye from Cawston has already been mentioned but other regulars included Chris Payne from Foulsham and Charlie Howard from Lenwade.

The relationship of dealers, butchers, farmers and the weekly market was a structure that sustained for many years but was broken with the advent of the Second World War when all sales were strictly controlled through the nominated markets by the Government.

The Christmas Sale and Fat Stock Show

In the early part of this century Messrs. Irelands in conjunction with many of the local shopkeepers, introduced a Christmas Sale and Fat Stock Show. The local traders contributed to the prizes for the many classes and there were cups and rosettes provided by Irelands. The groups of animals and fowls including pigs, sheep, cattle, domestic birds and turkeys were divided into many classes and the showing, judging and selling was a great social draw for many people in Reepham and from further afield. Like all stock shows the animals were the main attraction; they won the prizes and then suffered the unfortunate dignity of being sold to the highest bidder for slaughter for the Christmas trade.

This annual sale and show began early and finished late and it ran with considerable success for some ten years until 1914. It attracted large entries in all sections and was a very popular event for exhibitors, buyers and the residents of Reepham generally. Competition among the exhibitors was always keen and very high standards were reached. Among prominent Reepham exhibitors at that time were the farming brothers John, Ernest and Tom Sharpin while others included John Perowne from Brandiston and Billy Payne from Cawston. Rivalry among butchers was even keener and when a Reepham butcher was fortunate enough to obtain a prize beef, the carcass was early displayed prominently and proudly in his shop with its prize rosette. Needless to add, its delicately marbled fat in its appetising red meat was eagerly sought by his patrons, while its suet was a prize indeed. There was many a proud head of the household in Reepham in those days who brandished the carving knife above the roast beef of his Christmas dinner knowing that he could offer his family nothing finer. The Christmas Fat Stock Sale and Show of 13th December 1911 was a good example of Reepham Market at its most successful. In the week before, the local press had carried the market notices which indicated that the following number of animals had been provisionally entered:

85 Grand Over Yeared Fat Polled Angus,
Shorthorned Oxen and Heifers
250 Half Bred and Black Faced Sheep
12 Heavy Suffolk Fat Shearlings
100 Fat Pigs
1000 Fowls (including Turkeys, Fat Ducks,
Geese and Chicken)

Order of Sale

Pigs at 11 o'clock sharp
Fowls at 12
Beasts at 1.30
Sheep at 2.30

On the day, all those preliminary expectations were exceeded and Irelands dealt with possibly the biggest sale ever held at Reepham. The following report from the *Eastern Daily Press* of the next day tells it all:

REEPHAM. A SUCCESSFUL SHOW.

The market town of Reepham yesterday was crowded with farmers, butchers and dealers, on the occasion of Messrs. Irelands' annual Christmas show of fat stock. This year proved to be one of the best yet held, both in quantity and quality. The fat cattle comprised 140 prime over-yearled box bullocks, many of great weight and superior quality. There was also a larger supply of very choice sheep, black-faced and half-bred hoggets. The trade for beef was very good, the highest, in fact, for several years, 1 cwt. live weight fetching from 45s. to 47s. Mutton trade was also very much better.

Appended are a list of the prize winners for cups presented by gentry and tradesmen of the district:

Best fat beast, silver cup, value £5 5s. – Won by Mr G.F. Boddy of Bolwick with a black polled homebred, weighing 14 cwt. 2 qrs., 2 lbs., and purchased by Mr Thomas Stimpson, Dereham, for £34 10s. Mr Boddy was, however, disqualified in consequence of his farm exceeding the radius of six miles. Mr George Seaman was therefore awarded the cup for a black Angus weighing 16 cwt. 3 qrs., and purchased by Mr F. Bayfield, Foulsham, for £39 10s.

Best butcher's bullock, fed by tenant farmer, silver cup – The winner was Mr John Perowne, of Guton Hall, with a red shorthorn, weighing 15 cwt. 2 qrs., and sold to Mr Charles Diggins of Holt for £37 10s.

Best pair of fat beasts, fed by tenant farmers – This was won by Mr John Perowne, of Guton Hall, with a pair of Scotch bullocks, bought by Messrs. F. Bayfield and Robert Stimpson for £32 10s. and £31 5s.

Best fat bullock fed by tenant farmer, presented by Reepham tradesmen, silver cup, value £5 5s. – Mr George Seaman, of Oulton, was awarded the prize with a black Angus, weighing 16 cwt. 2qrs., and sold to Mr B. E. Smith, Bunwell, for £41, the top price of the day.

Best pen of five cross-bred hoggets – Won by Mr John Green and sold to Mr Dickerson (Norwich) at 59s. each.

Best pen of black-faced sheep – Won by Mr John Perowne and bought by Mr W. Bayfield (Dereham) at 63s.

There were several other very good hoggets shown, which realised much better prices than of late. Twelve choice Suffolk shearlings realised 69s., 70s. and 69s. each; they were the property of Mr George Seaman.

Mr Edward Stimpson of Sall won both prizes in the swine class, the best pen of three fat pigs and the best single pig. They were sold at an average of £8 each to Mr Rump, Reepham. Mr Purdy of Cawston took the cottagers' prize for the best pig.

The best pair of turkeys went to Mr W. J. Comer of Weston. Mr Bartle took the second prize. The best pair of fat geese were sent by Mr R. Dawson and the second pair by Mr G. Brown. For the best pair of fat ducks Messrs. Lowe Bros., Guestwick, were awarded the prize, with Messrs. Gibbs Bros., Guestwick, second. Fat chickens, first prize Mr Lock, second prize Messrs. Gibbs Bros.

The pigs included some very heavy weights, and trade ruled rather better than recent prices, several making from £5 5s. to £8 10s. each. The poultry show included an exceptionally large supply, from 1,500 to 2,000 head being penned. Turkeys made up to 23s. each, ducks 4s. 3d. each, geese 7s. each, chickens 3s. 9d. to 4s. each.

The attendance was very large, and buyers attended from all parts of Norfolk, a large number of Norwich butchers, as well as the principal butchers from Fakenham, Dereham, Holt, Sheringham, Cromer, Overstrand, North Walsham, Aylsham, Foulsham and neighbouring villages. In the evening several of the company sat down to dinner, the chair being occupied by Mr Aubrey Radway, during which the cups were presented to the prize-winners.

Dinner in the King's Arms club room

The conclusion of the press report mentions the dinner held in the evening. From the early years the bustle and enjoyment of the show was concluded (and some would say enhanced) with a dinner in the King's Arms club room, although in the latter years up to the Second World War it was held in the Sun Hall.

Mr Hubbard was the publican at the King's Arms and he was responsible for the decoration of the room and the preparation of the meal. It was wholesome fare, greatly appreciated and hungrily consumed to replenish the sturdy frames of the dealers, farmers, auctioneers and other men who attended – men who had spent the day in the business of showing, judging, buying and selling. Though no doubt they had found it necessary to replenish their

energies with a draught or two of ale and a hastily eaten pie, their stomachs hungrily awaited the evening repast. The meal offered copious amounts of beef and pork (generously supplied by Bayfields of Dereham) with the plates further filled with ample supplies of vegetables. This was followed by trifle or a fruit tart and custard and cheese was available for anyone who felt he had a space left to fill. All of this would be washed down with draught beer and whisky chasers. The meal was followed by speeches and the presentation of the show cups. In some years, the patrons enjoyed entertainment with recitals or monologues performed by the more musical or artistic members of the local community.

The hall would hold up to 100 diners and it was strictly an all-ticket affair. The tickets were keenly sought after and would be sold out long before the day of the dinner. Some of the diners would stay in Reepham for the night but the locals who attended would find their way home, late but happy and many a horse returned to its stable with a rider or driver oblivious to the world and encapsulated in a fug of sleep and alcohol.

The Christmas sale suffered mixed fortunes, particularly from the effects of the two World Wars and it took a long while before it returned after 1945. At the first post-war Christmas sale in 1954 the Reepham and District Chamber of Trade challenge cup was won by a Hereford steer exhibited by Mr Simmons of Witchingham and the beast was bought by Mr F. Sutton of Acle. There were many other classes to be judged for cattle and pigs. There was a heavy entry of cattle for this particular show sale although the entry of more than 450 pigs is reputed as being down on the previous week. Although the Christmas sale and show was revived the dinner was not and something that had figured prominently on the Reepham calendar for so many years had disappeared.

The largest post-war Christmas poultry show ever recorded, when over 800 lots changed hands, had been held the previous year in December 1953 when loading and dispersals were maintained by the aid of torches long after dark. There was a fine show of turkeys with some birds realising up to 6/- (30p) a pound. Apart from the turkeys that year, the sale offered a wide range of poultry to grace the Christmas dinner tables of the local area, this included caponised chickens, coloured birds, best quality hens, cross breeds and a number labelled as "inferior fowls". There were geese and ducks and for those who did not want poultry they could have purchased a rabbit, wild or tame.

Although it was Edward VII who made the eating of turkey at Christmas fashionable, the present popularity of the turkey is very recent. The high price paid at the market in 1953 was for the purchase of a bird that was, at that time, considered a luxury. Goose and chicken were routinely eaten on Christmas Day until the late 1950s when the turkey, with the help of a certain Mr Matthews, began to dominate. More than 10 million are now sold every year at Christmas.

The saleground (now occupied by the Station Road car park) was not large compared to the size of other markets in Norfolk. It was of a triangular shape with two large entrances: one situated where the present car park entrance is and the other further down the hill towards Towns End Corner. There was also a small pedestrian entrance into Chapel Walk (often

called Saleground Alley). There was no pavement alongside the area as there is today and the saleground went right up to the edge of Station Road.

Along the east side were the uncovered sheep and cattle pens. On the opposite side along Station Road was an area covered in corrugated sheets used for the penning of pigs and calves and next to this was a small brick and tiled barn. This had been built originally as part of a small group of buildings when the land had been part of a farm; when the area was bought outright by Irelands in 1883 it was still being used for the winter storage of cattle.

The west wall of the barn fronted directly onto Station Road and is remembered by many people for the profusion of bills and notices that were plastered over the lower brickwork. The barn was used as a storage and display area for the limited amount of deadstock sent for sale. Anything not sold would be stored here until the following week and in particularly cold weather calves to be sold would be put in the barn away from the icy draughts of the open barred cattle pens.

Next to the barn were the toilets and this area was also occupied by a stall which sold cockles, mussels and other shellfish to those attending the market. The market was small yet busy and the close proximity of the animals, the effluent generated by both men and beasts which was dealt with by limited drainage and the smell of shellfish must have offered a rare cocktail of heady yet rustic smells.

Indeed one abiding memory offered was the trail (and odour) of animal urine that found its natural way from the saleground pens and downhill towards the street drains at Towns End Corner.



A nice white turkey, among those presented for sale at the first of the Christmas 1968 poultry auctions, has an anxious look in her eye, as though aware time is getting short. Holding the bird is Mr J. Haggerty.

In the centre of the saleyard was a row of poultry pens which individually held up to 10 birds. The pens were made of netting and the whole section was covered with a pitched roof to keep off the rain. Also in the centre was the wooden office used by Irelands on sale days and the weigh bridge. The site originally contained at the northern end a tall American prairie-style windpump, used to raise the water required by the saleground. In later years, a motorised pump was installed in a small shed situated over the bore pipe and the tower was removed. In recollections of the saleground this tall wind pump was remembered clearly by many people. In the early part of this century there were few houses along Station Road and the tower was clearly visible as people approached Reephram from Kerdiston, Wood Dalling and Cawston.

The Saleground Owners

Irelands was founded by Anthony and Henry Ireland who had extensive farming interests in Guestwick and Wood Dalling. They opened offices in Guestwick and Foulsham from which

they conducted business as land agents and auctioneers and were well established when they purchased the orchard in Station Road which was to become the Reepham saleground, or Reepham Auction Mart as it was advertised in the local press of the time.

Henry's son Edwin took over the firm in the early part of this century and continued with its expansion particularly in selling at the large and lucrative market at Castle Hill, Norwich. By the 1930s Irelands had become a large and active organisation in the farming and general agricultural life in Norwich and North Norfolk. At this time, their main office was based in Norwich and they were holding regular sales and auctions at Norwich Castle Hill, North Walsham and Holt as well as Reepham. During the 50 years, until his death in 1953 at the age of 92, there were few members of the farming fraternity in Norfolk who had not had dealings with E. B. Ireland.



Early days of Irelands: centre seated is Henry John Ireland of Wood Dalling; standing on the left is Alfred George Gibbs.

Hubert Sheringham started work with Irelands in 1946 as an articled pupil and he had to pay the firm a premium of £100 a year to work there and learn the trade of auctioneer and estate agent. Thankfully, this form of apprenticeship lasted for a relatively short time and within two years he had become qualified and remained with Irelands for the next 40 years until he retired as a senior partner in 1986. During his time with Irelands Hubert was a regular auctioneer at Reepham. Immediately after the Second World War the rural areas of

Norfolk still relied heavily upon the established system of markets to buy and sell and the many local markets held on different days of the week provided employment to a number of company auctioneers and other staff who would attend and carry out their particular tasks.

Other well known auctioneers at Reepham included Alfred King from Trunch, Brian Boning and Arthur Gibbs from Norwich and more locally William (Billy) Ewing who had been employed by Irelands until he was called up for war service in 1940. During the war he would help out at local markets when on leave and when demobbed in 1946 he was re-employed by Irelands and continued to sell at Reepham until its final closure. The saleground was often a bustle of activity, there would be three auctioneers working at the same time selling poultry, pigs and cattle and assisting them would be the porters, helpers and clerks all going about their business in this relatively small area.

These market years are connected with the names of many people who had a direct and indirect association with the saleyard: Ernie Lines, "Ikey" Wright and Les Blyth who did the portering; Tom Bacon who looked after the poultry; Herbert Vardigans who used to help wash down the yard and take away the days accumulation of straw and manure; Billy Freestone who unlocked and locked the saleyard and carried out the general caretaking duties; and Tom Hall who helped with the clearing up. There was Fords the bakers in the Market Place who supplied the bread and meat pies which fed many of those attending and Clifford and Violet Watson who between them were licensees of The Sun, the local public house favoured by Irelands for 42 years until Violet retired in 1964.



Violet Watson

Irelands carried out a number of local farm sales and in the depressed inter-war years the appropriate page in the *Eastern Daily Press* would carry the auctioneers' advertisements for "excellent pair of brick and tile farm cottages", "desirable lots of household furniture and effects" and "Capital Holdings", "Live and Dead Stock", "Agricultural Carriages", "Choice In-

calf and heifers”, “Pedigree pigs and poultry and useful working horses”. There were many of these sales but much more went under the hammer than the items in the catalogues. In many cases the farm sale was not simply a sale but the disintegration of a way of life for a farming family and for some the breakup of a wider farming community.

Irelands Meadow

Irelands also held spring and Michaelmas deadstock sales. These sales were held on the meadow (known as Irelands Meadow) which was bounded by Kerdiston Road and Smugglers Lane – an area which in the last 20 years has been built on and is now covered with houses and bungalows. Before it was sold for development the meadow was used in later years for the parking of cattle floats and other vehicles but twice a year and for a few hours only it came alive with the bustle of Irelands’ spring and Michaelmas sales. Apart from the limited use every Wednesday in connection with saleground parking the field was used as a general recreation ground and particularly by the Band of Hope football team who played here during the 1920s.



Market day squeals: December 1954. With a squealing and a shooing, Mr W. Cook’s pigs tumble helter-skelter out of the lorry to Reepham Wednesday Market.

These two annual sales consisted of all manner and classes of agricultural machinery and miscellaneous dead stock that farmers wanted to dispose of. The sales would be held on

Wednesday and would start at 10 am so that the majority of items could be sold before the sale of beasts and poultry commenced at the saleground nearby.

The Michaelmas sale in October 1949 was typical of many successful sales held in these post-war years; the car park is recorded as having handled 54 cars and six lorries and a fine autumn day brought out a large number of people, some buying, some selling, others who were interested to buy if a bargain came their way and the majority who just came for a morning out. More than 350 lots were offered and many were cleared at keen prices; it was probably not a day for the bargain hunter. The more important items sold on the day included a Fordson Major Perkins diesel tractor £475, chicken houses to £31, Morris 8 van £60, tumbrel £29, deep digger plough £30 and pitch pole harrows £32.

On such days, a large number of people would attend and the Market Place would be full of parked vehicles. Wednesday was the one busy day of the week for the local police with a constable controlling the influx of people and traffic by standing on point duty at Towns End Corner.

Parking Problems

In the days of horse-drawn travel parking had never been regarded as a nuisance but the increasing numbers of motorised vehicles caused the residents of Reepham to consider from the early 1920s that it was a problem and after much public agitation the use of the Market Place as a car park was brought about by the former St Faiths and Aylsham RDC. The council purchased the property from the then Lady of the Manor (a member of the Eglington family) for £400 in 1937. The ancient market was bought by the district council on the urgings of the parish council who had been concerned for a number of years at the way the Market Place had been managed, after being let to a lessee of the Lord of the Manor.

The End of an Era

The market finally closed on the 8th March 1972. During the previous week, the *Eastern Daily Press* had carried a notice from Irelands which stated:

The Auctioneers wish to announce that the weekly market for live and dead stock will be discontinued after 8th March 1972, periodic sales of household furniture and effects will be held in future and the first of these will take place on Tuesday 28th March.

Like many other local markets it had suffered a severe decline in trade by the early 1970s and it was inevitable that a market that was small compared to others in the county was no longer financially viable. Irelands decided to concentrate their interests on the much larger and more lucrative Norwich market. Keys weekly market at Aylsham had been established in 1954 and as Reepham dwindled so Aylsham succeeded with a lot of the people involved in the general market business preferring the Aylsham saleground with its much larger range of pens and cages, much of it under cover, and easier parking on the actual site.

There had been a drastic decline in the number of animals being sold; fat cattle and calves were no longer being sold here and the market relied entirely on the sale of pigs, rabbits,

poultry and dead stock and the occasional sale of furniture and household effects. The spring and Michaelmas sales went when Irelands Meadow on the Kerdiston Road was sold. The number of fat pigs and sows sold each week fluctuated greatly, sometimes it reached 150 animals but the weekly trade was often much lower and far too often the numbers sold were less than 50. The heady times of the early 1950s had gone forever; market days when record entries of more than 500 pigs, up to 200 cattle and on one particular occasion in September 1952 when more than 2,500 head of poultry were auctioned would never again return to Reepham.

The annual Christmas Show had been held in December 1971; the animals were prepared, shown and judged as they had been for the previous 100 years but the day was tempered with an element of regret and the knowledge that this was probably the last one. The market was held in the early weeks of 1972 and then on Wednesday 8th March Irelands finally called it a day. Without ceremony and fuss the 32 fat pigs and sows that had been entered on that day were sold and loaded up for their various destinations. The dead stock was auctioned and the few traders, dealers, farmers and local people who attended drifted away in the early afternoon. The straw and manure was cleared away, the yard swept and washed down and in the failing late winter gloom the few electric lights were switched off, the gates closed and an area that had served Reepham and its rural catchment so well for nearly a century settled down to await its future. A brief report appeared in the *Eastern Daily Press* on Friday 10th March but it was linked in with the closure problems of the Dereham Auction Mart. The few words offered about Reepham were a small, yet unfitting epitaph to the death of a market that has once stood with the best that could be found in Norfolk.

The traffic problems in Reepham had been viewed with growing apprehension for a number of years and the closure gave Broadland District Council the opportunity to purchase the site from Irelands and in 1978 to open the area as a car park. The preparatory work and subsequent landscaping to achieve this has been very thorough and all trace and vestige of its former use has disappeared. As surely as Irelands Auction Mart buried all traces of Mr Bircham's orchard more than 100 years ago so the asphalt, bricks and ground covering shrubs has removed all traces of the saleground. We can only speculate as to what the next 100 years will bring to this area!

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