THE REEPHAM SOCIETY

Magazine

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

The Society co-operates with the Parish and District Councils in monitoring approved new developments and encouraging good standards of architectural design; ensuring that materials suitable to their location are used and features of the landscape protected. Society affairs are managed by an Executive Committee of twelve members who are elected annually.

In 1993 membership of the Society had reached over 400. Open meetings are held in eight months of the year, with speakers on a wide range of subjects; non-members are welcome. A Magazine is produced periodically (at least once a year) by a Society member, Michael Black; this has customarily contained items of historic rather than current interest; current matters are reported in occasional Newsletters distributed to all members.

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Introduction

The magazine will hopefully offer the reader articles of varying interest, although they are not all specifically about Reepham. The area of benefit for the Society includes the four Reepham parishes, Salle and Booton but occasionally I feel it is worth including something of a specific or historical nature from one of the nearby villages. In this issue I have therefore included an article about the duel stone at Cawston; many motorists on their way from Norwich to Holt or beyond will have sped past this memorial without even noticing its existence.

In 1698 a duel took place which tragically resulted in the death of Sir Henry Hobart. A stone memorial was erected some years later to commemorate this and today the site is looked after by the National Trust. It is situated about 100 yards to the south of the Woodrow Garage. Until it closed down in the 1960's the Woodrow Inn was a popular stopping place for motorists on the road to and from Holt and the North Norfolk coast. It was a pleasant country Inn surrounded by trees and in those days had the added attraction to the traveller of the duel stone in its grounds. The area was spoilt when the Inn closed and many of the trees were felled to enable a garage to be built there although the National Benzole Company which owned the site presented a small area around the duel stone to the National Trust.

It is sad that today's commercialisation has brought "Jet" petrol to a site which is of such local and historical interest. Unfortunately our priority these days is to help the traveller quickly on his way rather than to encourage him to linger and give some moments of his journey to a stone commemorating an event that happened 300 years ago. I have little doubt though, that in 300 years time the site of the duel will still be remembered but will that future generation still be using (or if not, at least remembering) "Jet" petrol!

The other articles are all Reepham based, I have gone back to the Moor House. Not to the House itself but into the kitchen garden to consider and enthuse about the glasshouse. This doyen of the Victorian age which at the Moor House has been so painstakingly rebuilt by the Leonard family and in particular by Mr. David Wright whose labours over the past two years have so transformed the grounds of this property. The area had been subject to neglect and disrepair for so many years and it is heartening that in a relatively short period the enthusiastic and sometimes quite seemingly brutal work carried out, has transformed the gardens back to a semblance of their former self.

It is unknown as to whether or not the bricks used in the building of the Moor House came from a local source but if they did they would have undoubtedly been supplied from a local brickmaker and probably from the kilns situated only a few yards up the road on Crown meadow.

Collison Bros. built many houses in Reepham with the largest number contained along the Wood Dalling and Cawston Roads'. All the bricks (and many of the tiles) used in the building of these properties were made on a site near Orchard Lane. The clay was dug on site, it was moulded into shape, fired in the kiln and the bricks were stacked nearby until ready for use. Nothing remains today of the brickyard but the legacy of brickmaking in Reepham is seen all around with numerous buildings displaying the many and varied styles, shapes, size and colour of these basic but essential items.

A large house that was certainly not built of local materials was Whitwell Hall, although the earlier Hall (much of which remains today) obviously was. The Hall built in the 1840's for Robert Leamon is of a handsome white brick roofed in slate, a style that made the House completely different to any other in the area. At that time few people in this area would have had the wealth to buy in for example, slate for the roof but Robert was to become a man of wealth and property and ostentation is the best way of describing his particular requirements.

During the course of more than 60 years from 1821 onwards Robert Leamon was to increase seven-fold the size of his Whitwell estate; his wealth increased also but the family fortunes were to reverse in the 1880's and with such drastic consequences. Like the Moor House though, Whitwell Hall is today in the state it was over 100 years ago and these two dwellings (along with Hackford Hall) display to our present generation the taste and grandeur of the families who were rich enough to build them. However, none of these families, the Birchams, Leamons and Collyers, could have foreseen that in the passage of time the Houses would remain as a lasting memorial long after they had gone.

Finally my introduction must include some specific acknowledgements, whilst many local residents have assisted me with oral and written material which has allowed me to write the enclosed articles my thanks in particular go to Tony Ivins, the Leonard family, David Wright and Reginald Rudd. Also to the 1898 publication of "An Account of the Church and Parish of Cawston" by Walter Rye which offered detail about the Cawston Duel.

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Brickmaking in Reepham

Like many of its neighbouring towns and villages in Norfolk, Reepham has through the centuries inherited a richness of buildings many of which survive today and hopefully with the benefit of the Reepham Conservation Area they will stand for generations to come.

They may not stand out so majestically as the two churches or some of the larger buildings such as Whitwell Hall or Hackford Hall but they are now regarded with the same level of importance and rightly so. They have an individuality of their own and as such they form a very natural part of our Town. This individuality is probably due to the fact that nothing but local materials were used. In previous times transport to move the required items other than short local distances was extremely limited. Unlike recent years when a great variety of building materials has been brought into Reepham by the easy availibility of transport. However has this choice and the large number of additional properties built; added or detracted from the overall charm of living in this rural market town? Most people would feel that the solid use for so long of local materials and the recent use of a much wider range have jointly helped develop Reepham into a place of some character.

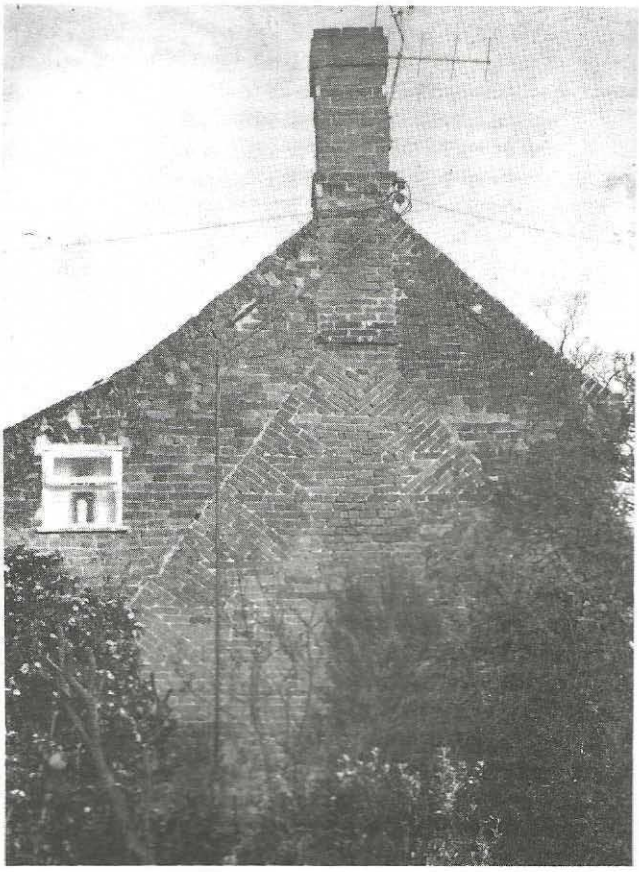
Whilst brick is generally considered to be the main building material in Norfolk the three traditional materials of clay, flint and carstone have been extensively used and these along with a number of minor ones have all played their part in the centuries old construction of buildings in Norfolk. They have all given their own individual character to the houses in which they were used . Not all these materials were used in this area as there was none locally available, notably carstone.

There are examples in the Reepham area of the use of materials which are no longer in favour as suitable for building. Weatherboarding is the style of finishing off wood framed buildings externally with horizontal courses of boarding, with one board being lapped an inch or so over the one beneath and originally they were finished with a coat of tar. This style of building found little favour in Norfolk except in farm buildings where it was frequently used. It was a quick and efficient way of erecting buildings and whilst it deteriorates if not looked after there are a number of examples to be found in farms around the Reepham area. Weatherboarding is to be found on the east facing wall of the house on the corner of Ollands Road/Church Hill and on the renovated buildings in Reepham Moor just further up from the old Black Lion public house.

Homes of half-timber work were built extensively from the Middle Ages and this method of building was reliant upon a good supply of timber and craftsman who were well acguainted with this particular work. There are still a number of barns in this area which display in their roofs the art of pinning together huge wooden beams and trusses but there are very few houses left which display this particular building art. Probably the best example in Reepham is a house in Back Street. This is a two storey house which is timber framed and plastered to the street side and brick to the rear, the main building dates from the 16th century. At this period in Reepham's history the Back Street was either the main road through Reepham or was the edge of a medieval market place which was probably much bigger than the present one. It is likely that most if not all the original houses along here were constructed in this half-timber work.

Most people associate Norfolk with flint and it is used extensively for building particularly in the south-west and along the north and north-east of the County. it was not easily obtainable in the Reepham area although it is seen in a number of specific places in the Town, notably the retaining wall built around the eastern edge of the Moor House and the wall on the southern end of Ollands Road (recently restored with the financial help of the Reepham Society). The buildings with the greatest amount of flint are of course the two churches of Reepham St.Mary and Whitwell St.Michael and the lower part of the churchyard wall along Back Street.

Own individual character.



Excavations were carried out in the grounds of Whitwell Hall in 1973 and some fine examples of medieval flint walling were uncovered, walls which were obviously part of a dwelling of some importance.

There are two main materials left to consider and these were the most extensively used in this area; clay and brick.

Originally clay was used in a process known as wattle and daub and this was the main way of building the walls . It consisted of a timber framing with wattle sticks laced vertically and horizontally in between which formed a key for clay mortar to be stuck on. The whole of the framing was generally plastered both inside and out and buildings of this construction have almost the same appearance as those built of clay lump.

Clay lump was first used in Norfolk about 350 to 400 years ago and was still used as a housebuilding material by local builders up until 50 to 60 years ago. There are some good examples at Kerdiston which were built for the District Council in the 1920's.

An old saying 'Give it a good hat and a stout pair of boots and it will last hundreds of years' is attributed to a clay lump house. The 'hat' is the huge over-hanging eaves and the "boots' being the solid base of brick or flint, the base usually being tarred for additional protection. Sometimes the houses were built with a dripboard about halfway down the side walls which would divert rainwater away from the 'boots'.

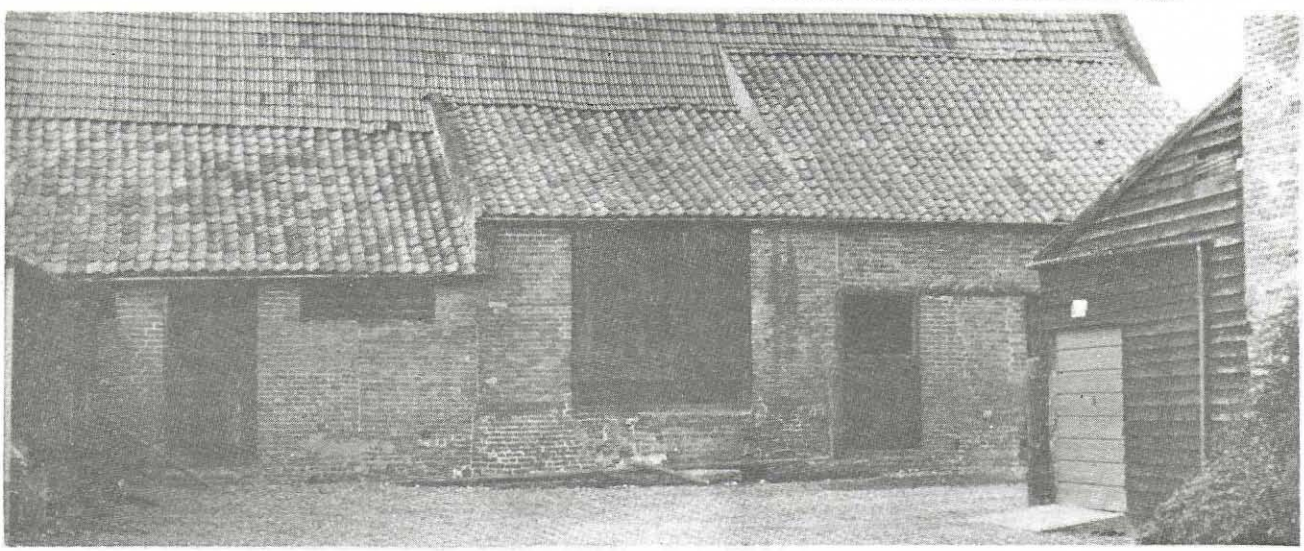
Clay was used because it was extensively available in this area, it only had to be dug out of the ground. There are many pits scattered around which testify to years of activity in extracting this material.The best example being the clay pits at Booton; these water filled pits have a reputation for being very deep which indicate to the large amount of clay that was taken over a long period of time. This would have all been hand dug, loaded into small carts and then transported to the required site. Anyone who has experienced digging out clay will appreciate how difficult the task was and these labourers were men of great strength, often renowned for their capacity to consume large amounts of liquid to appease the thirst that this work brought, particularly in the Summer months.

To make clay lump the clay would have been spread out in a thick layer and all stones which were larger than a walnut would have been removed. The clay would then have been watered and short straw, dried grass or sedge to act as a binding agent would have been spread over it and trodden in. This process was known as 'puddling'. A horse or the labourers in their bare feet would have carried out the 'puddling', which broke up the natural fracture lines in the clay and so reduced its proneness to break-up by weathering.

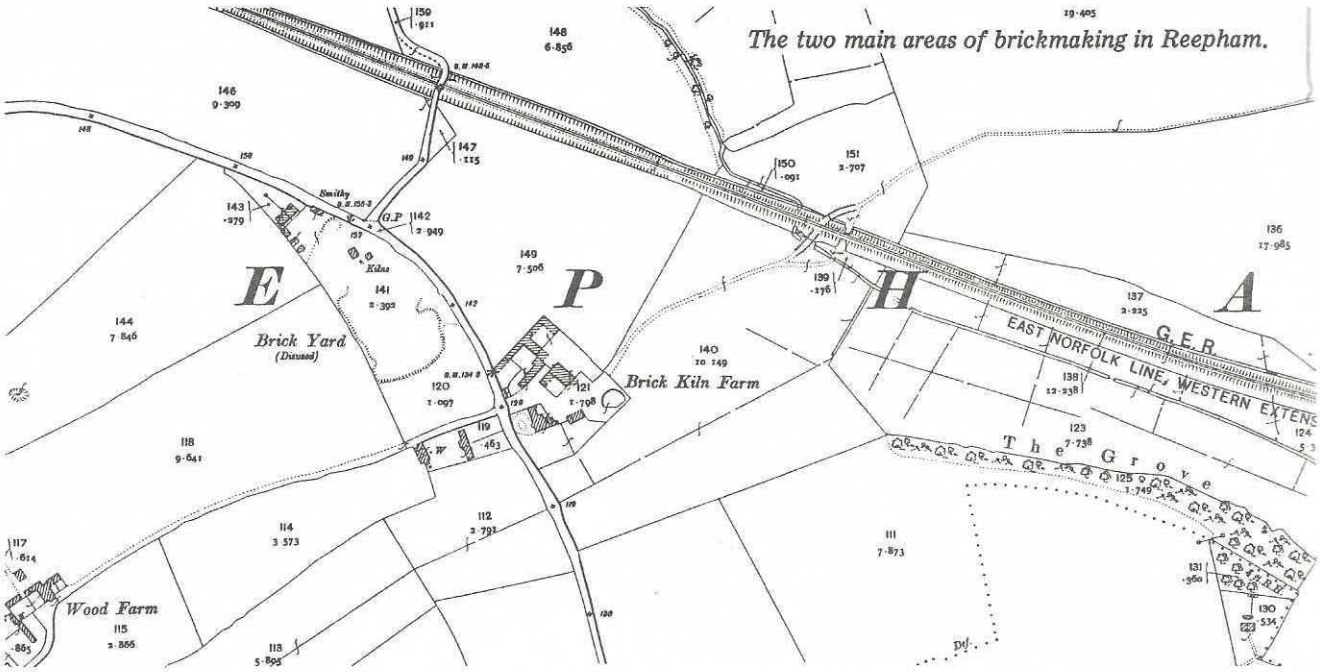
The clay was then put into wooden moulds or frames to form a block which was generally eighteen inches long by nine inches wide by six inches deep, these would have been used for the external walls. Blocks were made to the same length and depth but only six inches wide for the internal walls. The blocks were set on level ground for a few days and when sufficiently dry were turned up on end and taken to a platform where they were left to finally dry out. Depending upon the time of year this could take a month or two and often the blocks were formed throughout the Winter for use the following Spring.

The clay lumps would then be built on a plinth of brickwork or flint-work by setting the lumps into clay mortar. The finished walls were then finished with a coat of clay slurry, topped with tar, then sanded and coloured. In other parts of Norfolk (particularly in the south) different colours were often used but in this area the houses were mainly white. The finishing coat had to be applied as quickly as possible after the wall was built as it was essential not to let water get into the clay lump as it would disintegrate very easily. On farm buildings (and sometimes on labourers cottages) the clay was often tarred. This made for a long lasting water tight building but asthetically it was not very pleasing; could anything have been gloomier to a poor farm labourer trudging back in the falling light than to go back to a black house.

Bricks, Pantiles and Weatherboarding.



The two main areas of brickmaking in Reepham.



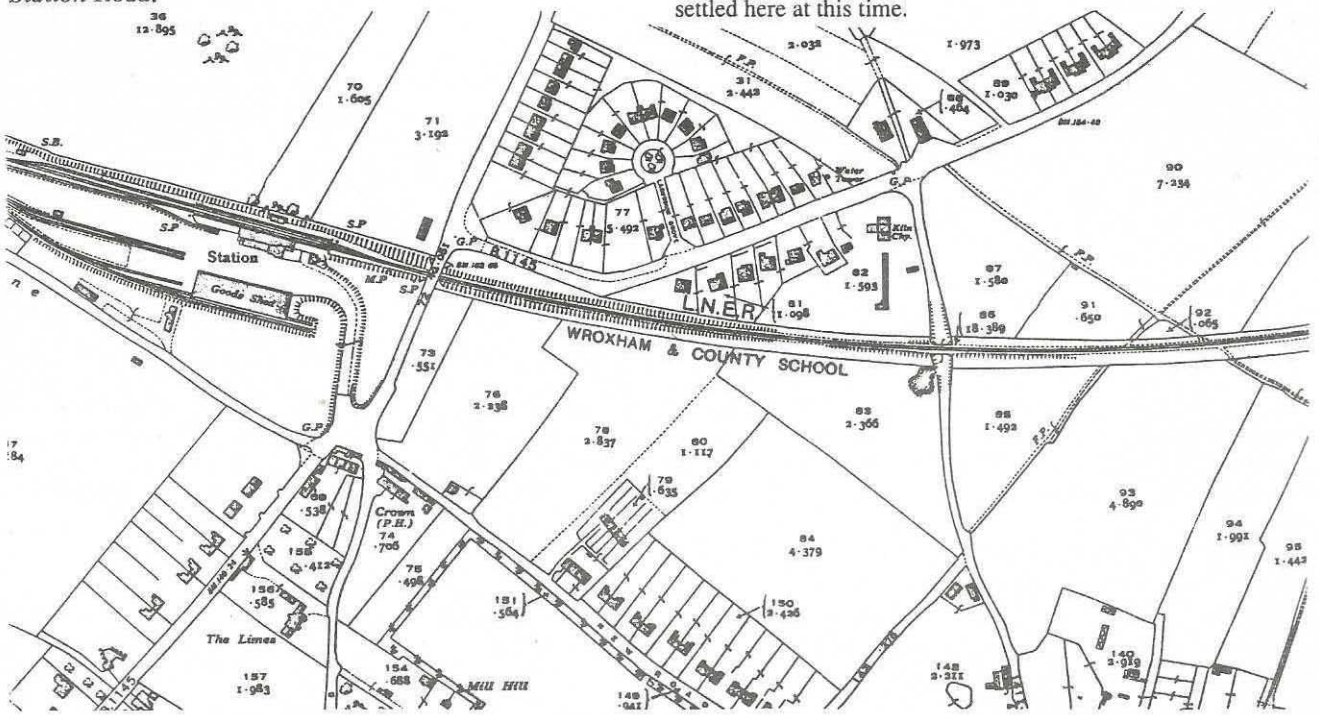
The O.S. map of 1886 shows the area in Kerdiston which had been used for at least 200 years, it closed down at the end of the 19th century.

The second map shows the Cawston Road area from just before the Second World War; all the houses were built from bricks made at Collisons brickyard (marked on the map as Kiln Chy.).

Kilns were originally situated in the field just to the north east of the Crown P.H. — bricks made and fired here were used to build Newland Villas in Station Road.

Covering the solid clay-lump building would have been a roof of pantiles or thatch. Pantiles would have been laid on Norfolk reed and hair mortar. Thatch always seems the best covering for plaster walls and in this area good thatching straw and not reed would have been used.

Finally, we come to brick, the material that was used most extensively for building houses and farm buildings in this area. Brickwork was introduced into this country in Roman times but the art of brickmaking ceased after they left and it was not re-introduced until the Middle Ages when brickmaking was brought to East Anglia by the many Flemish weavers who settled here at this time.



This area with its large pockets of suitable clay must have proved of great benefit to these immigrants who soon made and used bricks, a use that paralleled in growth with their increased prosperity.

Bricks are made out of clay dug out of the ground and allowed to weather, it is moulded into shapes and then baked. The brick earth contains sand and clay and other ingredients including oxide of iron and lime; these two are the main colouring agents with the maximum amount of iron producing a dark rich red. This is the natural colour of bricks made from clay from this area.

Reepham has a richness in buildings built of brick not just in the older areas of the Market Place, Back Street and The Moor but in most other areas of the Town where the choice and use of brick reflects the now past industry of brick making in Reepham. In the past most villages had a clamp or kiln, usually situated next to a ready source of clay, from which bricks were produced. Marshall Howard a builder in Cawston operated a large kiln on the outskirts of the village until after the Second World War and brickmaking was practised in Foulsham until the early part of this century

Reepham seems to have had two main places of brickmaking, the first one in Kerdiston. It is known that there was a thriving brick building business here throughout the nineteenth century and probably throughout the previous century also. There is a farm here called Brick Kiln Farm and the field directly opposite is shown on the 1846 tithe map as 'Brick Kiln Pightle'. It also shows the outline of a number of buildings which on the first O.S. map of the area in 1886 are shown as the kilns, a number of pits from where the clay was dug are also detailed. When the map was revised in 1906 the brick kilns were described as "disused' although some buildings including a smithy remained. John Eglington of Kerdiston is listed in Kellys Directory of 1846 and 1853 as a brickmaker as is Freeman Eglington in 1865 and 1875.There is no such mention in later directories and it is assumed that brickmaking ceased here towards the end of that century.

Nothing remains today but if you look carefully you can find pieces of deep red brick in the ground around the kiln area. If you stand here and look eastwards towards Reepham, the field in front of you (brick kiln pightle) shows severe undulations and some very high banks, evidence of where the brick clay was dug for so many decades.

Towards the end of the 1870's, Newland Villas, the row of houses in Station Road were built by Arthur Collison; who was in business as a publican (the Black Lion P.H.)and a builder and he used bricks from a nearby site. Brickmaking had been carried out for many years on the area bounded by the Cawston Road and New Road. In 1846 the two small fields here were named as Clamp Close (situated just north of The Crown P.H.) and Brick Kiln Close (the area today on which the houses in New Road are being built). Brick making was carried out here although it suffered certain difficulties in 1881 when the line of the new railway was laid directly through the site. It seems that Arthur Collison bought the area of land between the new railway line and the Cawston Road and during the late 1880's he built a new and large kiln at the eastern end bounded by Orchard Lane. Collisons were able to utilise the clay resources on this site to produce the bricks which during the 1920's and 30's built most of the houses that stand today on the Cawston Road, Wood Dalling Road and in Laburnham Grove (an area originally called The Mountfield Estate) and the houses on New Road built for the former St. Faiths and Aylsham R.D.C.

Reginald Rudd who lives in Richmond Rise remembers working in the brickyard during the 1930's when he was apprenticed to Collison Bros.

"The brickyard was entered from the Cawston Road near the junction with Orchard Lane. It was a triangular shaped site and it ran along the railway line at the back of the houses on the south of the Cawston Road." When the houses were first built they had relatively small gardens but with the closure of the brickyard the gardens were extended over the old site and down to the railway line. Today nothing remains, the site is now entirely covered by houses and the pits from where the clay was dug have long been filled in and grassed over. Even the pit which gave the site a continuous supply of water has completely disappeared.

"The pit from where the clay was dug was situated at the bottom near the railway line; digging clay was a hard task but made easier by having a bucket of water standing nearby, this was used to wet the spade each time before it was put into the clay. The clay slipped off easier with the spade wet but it was very different if the spade was dry, the clay would stick and each shovelful had to be scraped off.

The clay was then taken to a large tank about 10' in diameter, known as a pugging mill, here it was mixed with water piped up from a nearby pit. The tank had a central spindle into which was fixed a bar, this extended across the top of the tank and five downward spikes were fitted to each side of the bar. It resembled a large spiked comb. A donkey or pony was harnessed up to the spindle and then walked round and round the tank so that the spikes thoroughly mixed the clay and water. Initially this was hard work for the animal but it became easier as the water was worked into the clay and a thick paste created." A great deal of energy was needed to pound and pummel the clay to the required consistency; it is difficult to believe that before horsepower was used this task was carried out manually - hard work indeed!

"Towards the end of the brickyard life the pugging mill was replaced by a crusher which was driven by a little petrol engine. It mixed the clay thoroughly and was also able to crush the stone and other impurities which previously had to be removed by hand. Whilst this process was faster than using a donkey or pony it was not so reliable and would often breakdown.

When the clay had been thoroughly mixed into an almost plastic state the excess water was drained off (back into the pit from where it first came), the large stones would be removed and the wet clay would be dug out and barrowed up to the brickmaker.

He would take a double handful of wet clay and throw it into a mould, the clay would be tamped down, the top skimmed off and the wet brick shape turned out into a nearby barrow.The mould was always placed onto a small wooden pad which had the letter 'C' moulded onto it and this letter would be impressed into the clay when the brick was turned out.

A typical Collison Brick — made in tens of thousands during a period of more than fifty years, they were used to build many houses in Reepham, most notably around the Cawston Road. This area was originally called the Mountfield Estate.

The secret of achieving good shape was to accurately throw an adequate amount of clay with the right force, if this happened air pockets would not form and the clay would properly fill the mould.

The clay bricks would then be moved to the drying shed where they were carefully stacked.This long narrow shed had a flat roof, slightly sloped to let the rain run off and with old sacks hanging down the sides to give further protection to the outside bricks against excessive wet. The elements, particularly the wind and sun would then partially dry them out; this process would vary depending upon the time of year and it could take several weeks.
The bricks were then barrowed into the kiln and stacked from the outer edge working into the centre. The kiln was a long semi-circular brick building built partly under ground level, with doorways at either end. It was constructed with an inner oven area where the bricks were placed and an outer brick skin which contained a lower level where the fires burned. The fire level was reached from the outside by a number of openings at the ground level which allowed the coal to be shovelled downwards directly onto the fire. The smoke and heat went upwards over the curved inner area and out through a number of top outlets.When the kiln had been filled the entrances would be sealed up using clay and old bricks, then the fires would be lit."

The temperature and time needed to fire bricks in a kiln was a bit rough and ready by the standards of today but these brickmakers acquired a skill in controlling the required temperature and were able to raise the fire to something like 1000 degrees centigrade and then to hold it for the required period.If the correct temperature was not acheived or maintained it would mean a wide range of quality in the bricks fired and could result in a high proportion of 'throw outs'. If the heat was built up too quickly the clay would dry out too soon and the bricks would crack. This particular kiln seems in Mr. Rudd's recollection to have been soundly built to a specific design and the firing of bricks had a high degree of success. The kiln would be fired three or four times a year and each firing would produce about 5000 bricks

There was one person permanently employed to run the site although when extra help was required other men from Collisons would be brought in and sometimes up to six would be employed on the site. The house on the Cawston Road known as 'Crows Nest'was built for the brickmaker. When Harry Collison was told that the first brickmaker to live here was going to be a Mr. Rook, he said "well the house must be called 'Crows Nest' " - and so it was. The last brickmaker for Collisons was Alan Jeffries who continued living here after the brickmaking ceased.

"Once the kiln had been lit the brickmaker would be responsible for bringing the fire up to temperature and keeping it going until the bricks had been baked. He would build the fire up gradually until a heat haze could be seen coming out of the top outlets,this showed the heat was going through all the kiln. He would then keep the fires going until the baking process was completed. This would take three to four weeks and during this period he would also be making more wet bricks ready for the next firing.

When it was adjudged that the bricks had been fired, the fires were left to die down and the kiln allowed to cool. It would take about a week for the fire to go completely out and a further 10 days or so for the kiln to cool down. The entrances would be knocked down and the bricks removed. They were very hot when taken out and it was hard work which required a thick pair of gloves; once outside the bricks would quickly cool.

The empty kiln would be checked in case any repairs were necessary to the structure and when ready the next lot of bricks would be barrowed in and the process started again.

There was a considerable colour difference in the bricks, those nearest the fire were burnt almost black with the colour changing to a light red for the bricks stacked in the centre of the kiln. The black bricks were very hard and if knocked would shatter into pieces whereas the light red bricks were soft and could be easily cut and shaped with a bricklayers trowel."

During the 1940's the clay on the site had been worked out and Collisons were buying in clay from Cawston. The brickmaking process was very labour intensive, with the clay having to be bought and with competition from the increasing availability of cheaper bricks transported from the Bedford and Peterborough brickfields it was no longer a paying proposition and the yard was closed.

The brickyard was in use for some 60 years and when it closed it finished a manufacture that had been carried out in Reepham for hundreds of years. All traces of these brickyards and their kilns have gone but their legacy remains in the houses and other buildings that we regard as such an essential part of the character of Reepham.

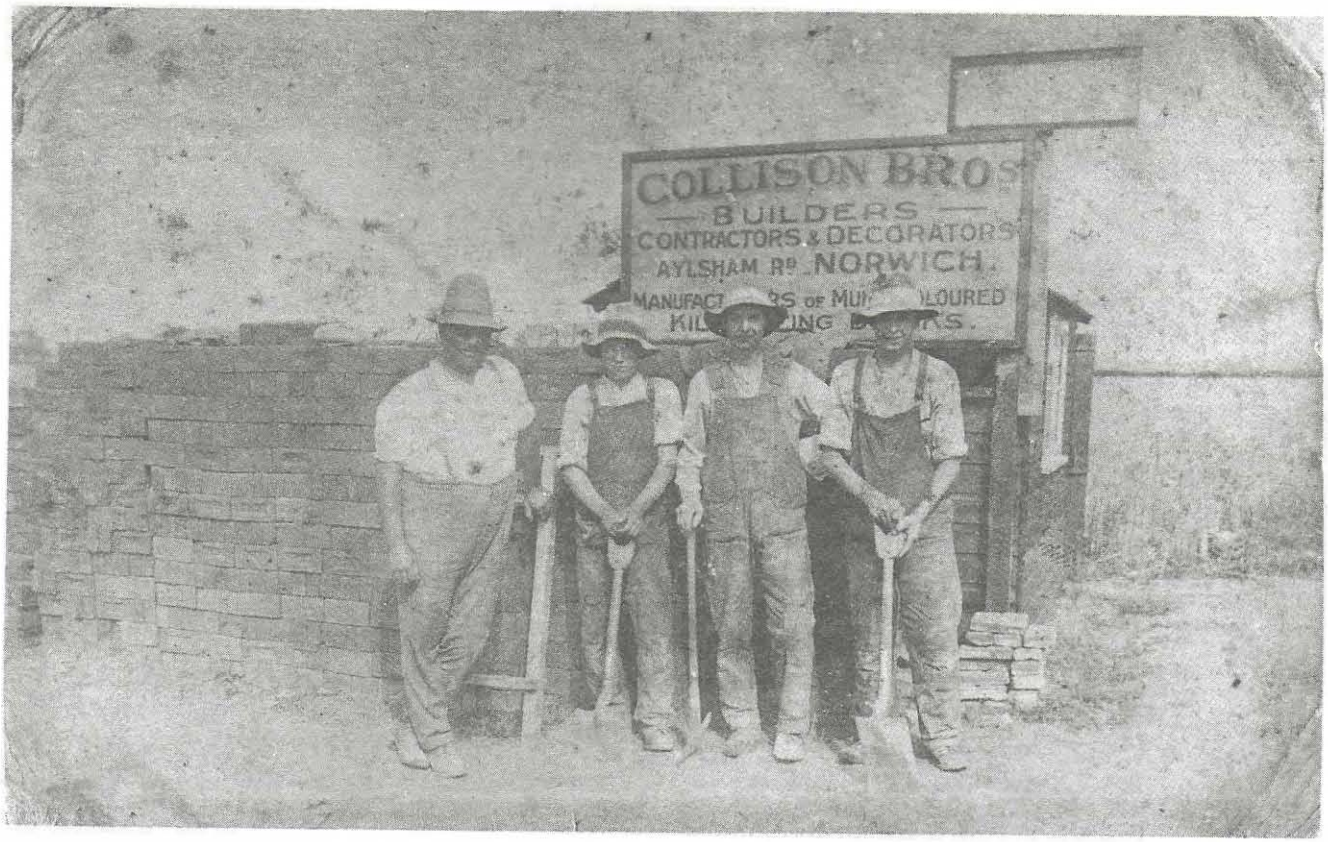
One of the houses situated along Reepham Moor; whilst architectural details dating from the sixteenth century can be seen at Moor Farm later details of interest from both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be seen in a number of later properties.

Close inspection in some areas of brickwork will show the Common English and Flemish brick bonds and the later Stretcher bond which was normally used when the structure included a cavity wall. Other less common brick bonds are also to be found here.

Ordinary bricks were used for decoration, usually this was acheived by creating patterns in profile or by the bricklayer integrating different types of bonding. Decoration by using coloured bricks is not noticable. Decoration on the end of buildings was often achieved in the chimney breasts or more particularly on the gable ends. The Dutch gable is often considered as a highlight of the bricklayers craft, whilst a number of good examples can be found in the nearby villages of Cawston and Foulsham; they do not appear to exist in Reepham.

Different size bricks can often be found in older buildings; until the end of the eighteenth century most bricks were made two inches deep but the introduction of the brick tax in 1784 caused the size to increase with a three inch brick becoming the common size thereafter. It is not uncommon to find bricks larger than the three inch size; it usually depended upon the personal size nominated by the local brickmaker.

COLLISON BROS. — Reepham Brickmakers and Builders
Left to right: Horace (Horry) Collison, together with Herbert (Witty) Witred, Stanley Alford and Harold Alford.



Moor House - Glasshouse

We are only too aware that even with an organisation like the Reepham Society it is often difficult to protect the buildings and general landscape of the Reepham area. Government initiatives gave us a local Town plan which in turn produced a conservation area. This protected area includes much of Reepham but even with this level of protection it is still possible for structures that have stood as part of our heritage for so many years, to disappear. Often quickly and sometimes without reasonable opposition or protest.

In recent years we have all lamented the loss of large areas like the original Ollands Estate, or buildings like the barn on School Road or even the brick wall along Bar Lane. They could have been saved and the structures put to an alternative use; admittedly the wall along Bar Lane would have been expensive to repair and in parts to rebuild and some would argue that its costly retention would have been of little value, other than aesthetic to future generations. However, if we can consider saving the wall at the southern end of Ollands Road then the Bar Lane wall should have merited a better fate than it ultimately received from the contractors bulldozer.

The statutory planning controls and conditions that we have all had to consider or confront at some time or other, coupled with the media interest and subsequent regret often expressed when an old building is demolished, has given us a greater awareness of the need to retain our past even if the structures saved have to be adapted to an alternative and more acceptable use to suit today's requirements. In recent years Reepham has achieved more successes than failures in retaining buildings rather than condemning them to the labours of the demolition contractors and much of this has been achieved by the local interest and desire in wanting to save buildings rather than lose them.The Reepham Society with its watchful reputation must take credit that the townscape we appreciate in Reepham today is there partly due to their effort.

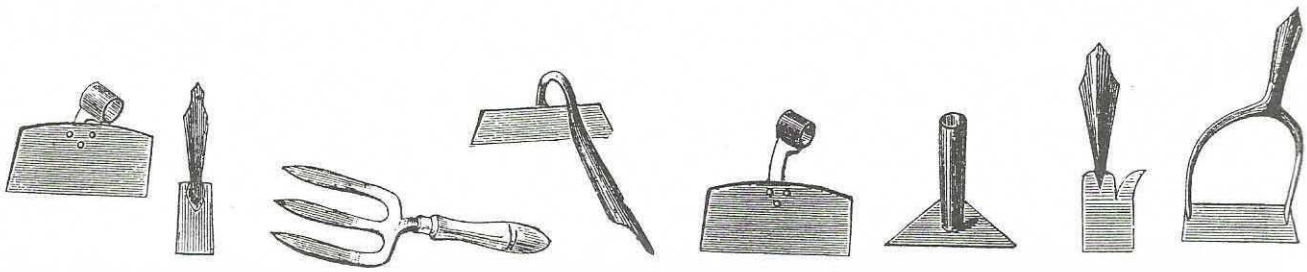
It was therefore to the relief of all interested parties a considerable triumph of common sense and a sense also of local history when it was announced that The Moor House was to remain. It was not going to ignominiously end up as a pile of rubble or that a plan of its grounds would end up on an architect's drawing board so that a number of 'desirable Tudorbethan residences' could be drawn in around the mature yet protected trees. Reepham already has a Moor House Close and many people would agree that we were not yet ready for a Moor House Park Estate also!

The Moor House was to be retained and planning consent was given for a number of different uses, whilst one of these was for residential purposes it was unexpected but extremely acceptable when the House was bought with the purchaser's intention of turning it into a family home. A decision which has now turned to fruition. It is even more gratifying to know that not just the House but the grounds and outbuildings also are receiving attention by the owners and eventually it is hoped to return it all to the state in which it was originally built and subsequently enjoyed over 100 years ago.

I'm sure many readers will have noticed and appreciated the labours of Mr. David Wright and Kirby Leonard, the owner's son, which has brought such a dramatic change in the gardens and grounds around the House. Many hours have been spent in cutting, planting and mowing these areas. Sometimes with a necessary ruthlessness and at other times with a required tenderness to ensure that a semblance of order and balance is returned to what was once an area of Victorian splendour set out in the formal and required manner of that age.

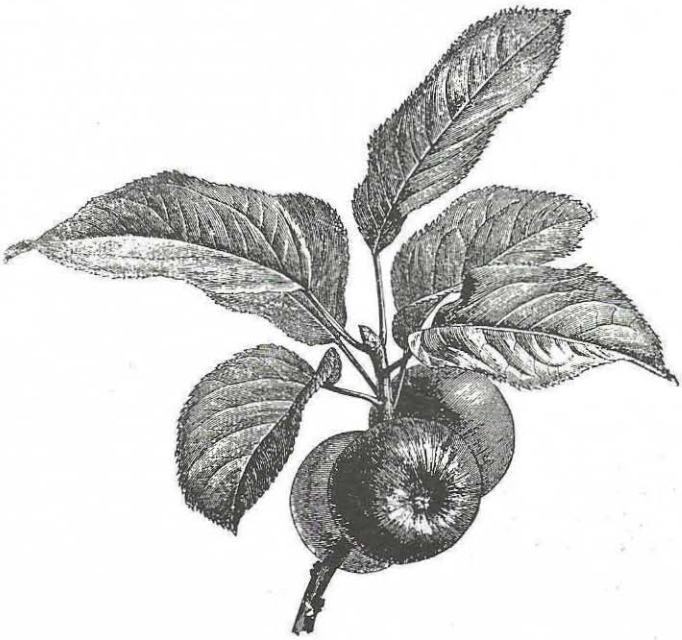
To the north west of the House and behind the wall along New Road was the kitchen garden, an area of status and immaculateness that was the domain of the head gardener and his staff and which would have been ranked by Samuel Bircham and his family as one of the most important areas in the Moor House grounds.

The walled kitchen garden is a form of gardening that was practised for many centuries but it reached its zenith in Victorian times when there was a tremendous demand for this relatively small area to produce a wide range of fruit, vegetables, flowers and plants to meet the constant requirements of the House and its occupants. A continous supply of vegetables for the dining table, fruit for dessert, flowers for decoration and pot plants for the house would be expected and it was the head gardener's job to meet this and for all days of the year.



However, this legacy of Victorian splendour was time consuming and highly expensive in terms of labour. As social conditions changed during the earlier decades of this century it became an area of neglect, forgotten and unused by its later owners, a victim of 20th century changes and the mass yet cheap import of fruit and vegetables which had previously only been available to the landowner who had money to spend on heated glasshouses and a large gardening staff.

The fruit and vegetable garden at the Moor House became like so many others an item of the past and because it was untended it slowly returned to a natural state.



This particular garden however was destined for a revival.

The brick boundary wall along New Road reaches 18' in height along its southern end; this was purposely built as it was to form the back wall of the carriage house and the stable block which in turn stood next to the large kitchen garden glasshouse. The precise and orderly Victorian thinking deemed that the glasshouse would face directly south overlooking the garden which would in turn be situated next to the ample and continous supplies of manure generated by the horses stabled next door.

Many people in Reepham were aware of this large glass building and most could recall that within their memory it had always been in a sorry state. Some and it is not very many, could remember it from the pre-War days of the 1930's when it was last commercially used. The memory though of most people was of its broken guttering, of the smashed glass panes which had once so majestically covered the wooden frame and of the frame itself, now paintless and in many places rotten. The interior was choked with nettles, brambles and other weeds which along with the few remaining hybrid plants had grown rampant as they all struggled for light and survival. It had become a jungle of untamed growth and it seemed to epitomise the collective neglect and disinterest that had befallen the House and grounds.

However this garden and the glasshouse in particular, is now part of a success story of which the owners must be justifiably proud and I'm sure they would like to share this with all those people in Reepham who have cares or feelings that something that could have so easily been forgotten has not just been saved but has been painstakingly, and I've no doubt expensively restored, to it's original condition.

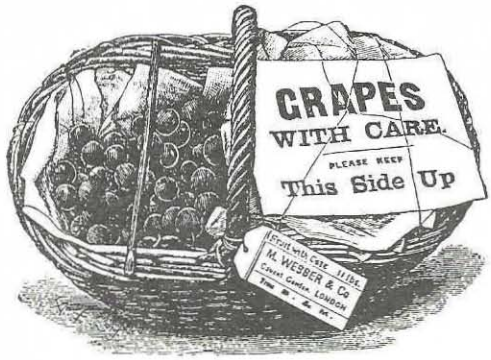
There were many reasons for the popularity of glasshouses with the Victorians but two in particular allowed this era to reach the zenith of its use. Prior to 1845 glasshouses had been common in the very large country houses where money to provide and support them had been no object to the rich landowner. In 1845 the removal of the glass tax meant that glasshouses and the general luxury of forced garden produce could be available to most houses of consequence in both town and country. Secondly, Thomas Rivers a well known Victorian nurseryman came up with the idea of 'orchard houses' after experimentation in 1848 at his nursery. He found that he could grow peaches, nectarines and apricots with great success if he sheltered plants with a glazed roof and sides and allowed ventilation through openings which could be adjusted so as to maintain a constant temperature. This gave maximum protection to the fruit trees and it ensured the setting of fruit in Spring and the thorough ripening of next year's fruiting wood during the Autumn.

He wrote a pamphlet about this called "The Orchard House" which was so popular that it appeared as a book and this ran to many editions during the decades after 1850. It was said that the orchard or large glasshouse became so familiar and essential in a good Victorian garden that no other garden structure up to that time had ever advanced so quickly in popularity.

Initially the orchard house differed from its companion glasshouse as it was primarily to grow fruit in. However it was soon found that a broad range of garden fruit and vegetables could be grown together and the Moor House glasshouse is a good example of a unit that was able to offer this double requirement. The high north wall allowed for trained fruit and the lower south area was ideal for a wide range of other fruit and vegetables which would grace the dining table.

Up to the early/mid part of the 19th century there were only a small number of vegetables available for the country house table and during the winter months the variety was very limited indeed. It was said that a turnip, cabbage or leek were often the winter mainstay although broccoli, cauliflower, peas, seakale and artichoke were becoming popular. As the century progressed gardeners found that by forcing vegetables on hotbeds of fermenting manure, in forcing sheds, frames, terracota pots or in warm glasshouses they were able to offer a wider range of vegetables and fruit and for them to make an out-of-season appearance on the dining table.

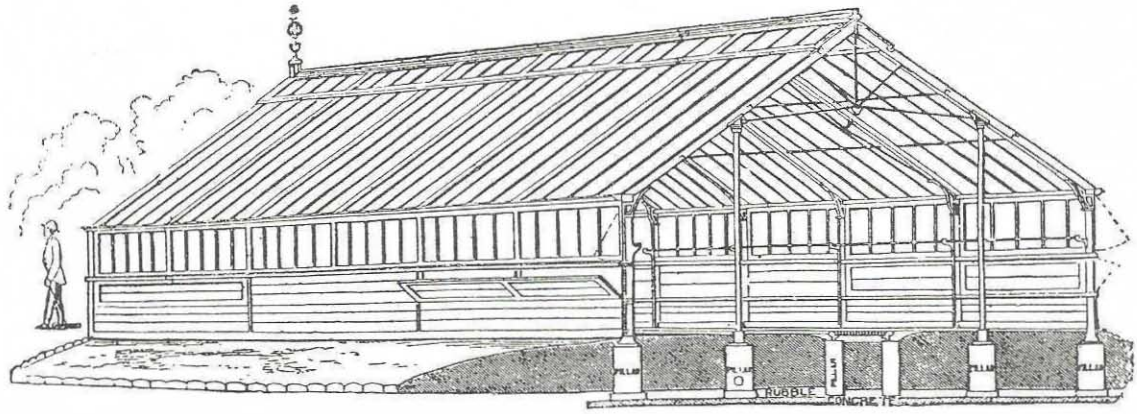
It was possible to provide fruit from heated glasshouses two months or more earlier than its normal season. A glasshouse the size of the one at the Moor House would have undoubtedly been fitted with a system of ironpiping which would have been fed from a small outside boiler and the heat provided would in turn be used to force on the fruit and vegetables.



The Moor House glasshouse presents us however with something of a conundrum because there is no evidence of a boiler house or any form of heating, other than natural sunlight, being provided. Miss Ann Bircham whose family owned the House can recall the kitchen garden area during the 1920's but cannot recall the existence of any form of heating. The internal ironwork of the glasshouse is structured with a large open hole in each support indicating that is was probably designed to take a heating pipe but for some unknown reason they were never installed. It was known that when Samuel Bircham built the House his wife was never happy to live here and in consequence the time spent here was on a limited basis. Perhaps Samuel felt that the cost of installing a boiler and then running this for an irregular household use was an expense that could be avoided. It seems therefore that from the time it was built and until the tenancy of Mr. Ernest Hudson (1903 to 1931), the glasshouse was used in a fairly formal gardening way but was still able to provide a wide range of fruit such as peaches, nectarines, figs, early vegetables for the winter table, summer salads including tomatoes and cucumbers and no doubt melons, a particular Victorian favourite. Gooseberries, raspberries and currants could also be potted-up and brought on in such a house.

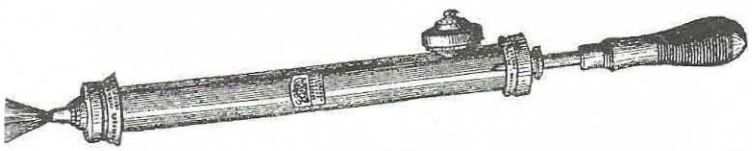
When Ernest Hudson rented the Moor House in 1903 he introduced a more regular use to the glasshouse - he turned it into a commercial peach house. The house provided a cool shelter to several peach trees which would have been trained to fan shapes. This meant that in January the dead wood (which had borne fruit the previous season) would be cut off and the young shoots formed the last Summer would be tied-in to wires which were nailed into the north wall. This pruning and tieing-in would have been carried out to a high standard, if not the work would be undone and would be painstakingly re-tied to the head gardener's satisfaction.

The peaches that were grown were picked and sent for sale to Covent Garden in London; during the earlier part of this century fresh semi-exotic fruit commanded good prices and there was little competition from the Mediteranean countries. The fruit would be picked one or two days in advance and laid out to dry so that the skin would lose the effects of humidity which would have built up in the glasshouse. The peaches would then be wrapped in tissue paper or in a thin layer of cotton wool and the wrapped peaches were then placed in boxes (which usually held twelve fruit) and these small boxes would be stacked into returnable fruit hampers.

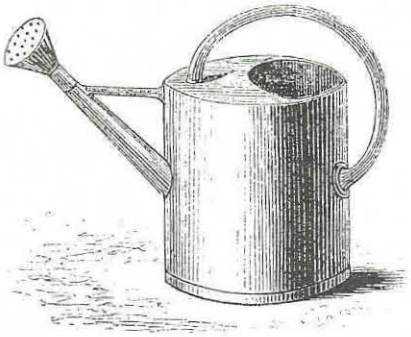


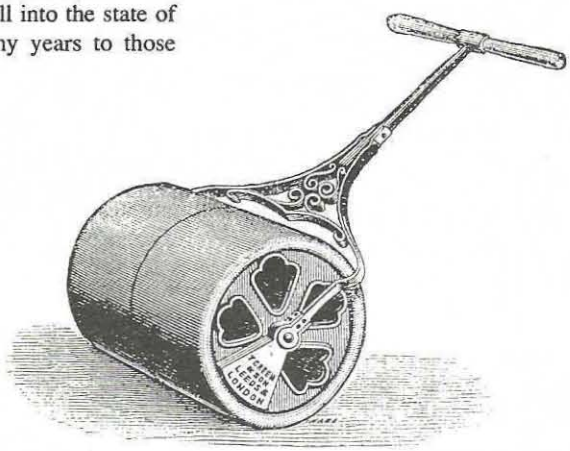
After the fruit had been firmly yet securely packed it would be taken to Reepham Station and from here start its journey to London. It arrived after only a few hours and would enable the fruit picked in Reepham to arrive perfectly ripe and ready for immediate dinner table consumption.

The glasshouse today is a wonderful structure, the triumph of a desire to return a useful and well built example from the the Victorian age back to a pristine state and for the building to be used once more for its original purpose. Whilst we, the readers, are probably content with our 10'x6' or 12'x8' green houses



When Ernest Hudson died in 1931 the House remained empty for a number of years until it was used for military purposes during the Second World War. In these few years up to 1940 the Bircham family retained the services of a gardener who continued to work and look after the kitchen garden and the glasshouse. It is fair to say that from the War onwards the use of the glasshouse declined and it subsequently fell into the state of dilapidation that became familiar for so many years to those people using New Road.

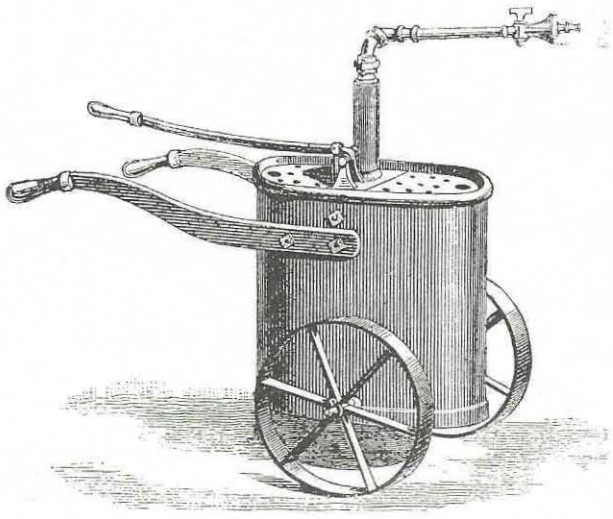




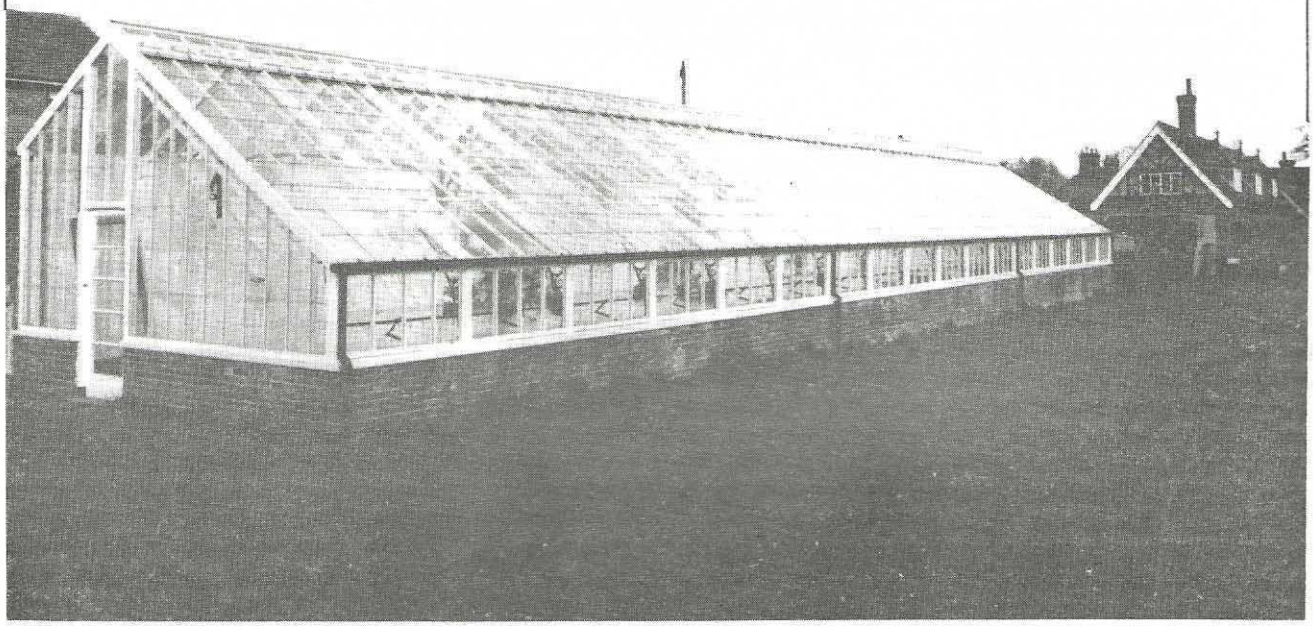
Care and expense though has now been lavished on the glasshouse and today it resembles closely the state in which it would have been seen over 100 years ago; but what efforts it has taken. More than 1500 panes of glass were purchased and installed, considerable carpentry time has been spent on repairing and replacing the damaged woodwork particularly the lower opening window frames. All the original Victorian ironwork supports have been retained although they were in good need of cleaning and repainting. The structure however proved to be remarkably sound and what is seen today is all original. Even the handpump on the eastern end has been restored to working order. There is an underground tank at this end which collects rainwater from the glass roof, the tank is not overlarge for such a building of this size and David Wright feels that in some long past hot Summer the tank would almost certainly have been completely emptied.

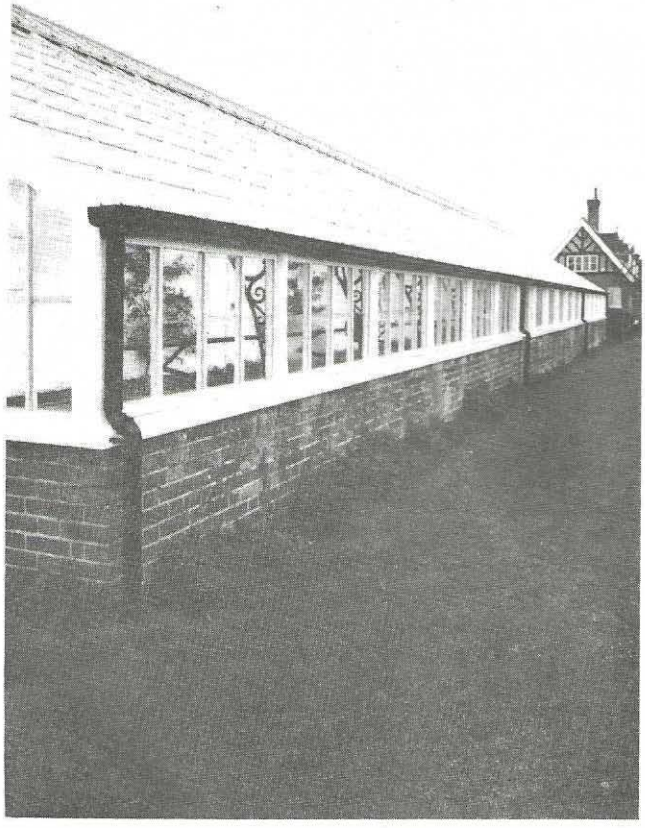
There is one other feature from the past that remains in the building - a large vine. This is one plant that has withstood all the natural turmoil and upheaval of the past 50 years. Hopefully this year it will produce a harvest of grapes, the first for many years to come. Ann Bircham can recall the vine being here in the 1920's; vines were a favourite with the Victorians so is it feasible that here is a survivor from the plants installed by Samuel Bircham's gardeners so long ago.

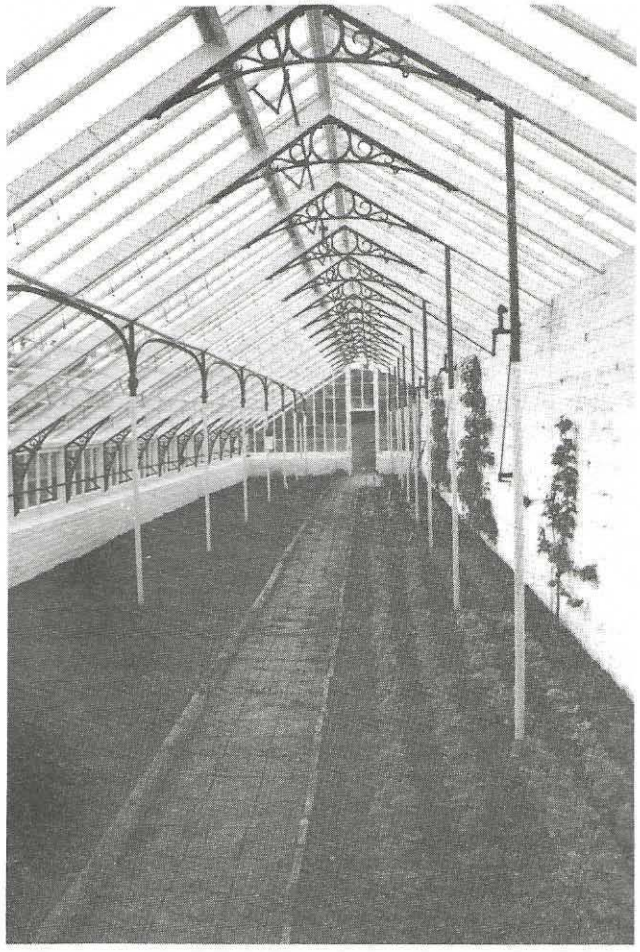
bought in an easily erectable state, we can offer nothing but admiration for a project that has seen the rebuilding of a glass structure 100'x18'x18'. Now that their labours have achieved such a success let us hope that those instrumental in this project will have many years "fruitful" pleasure from it.



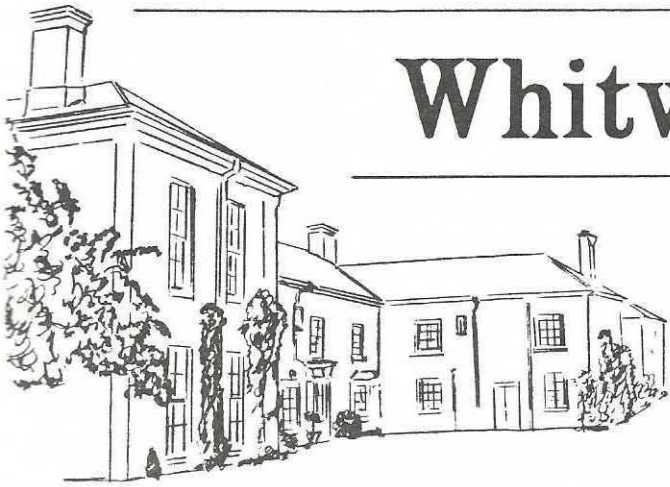
THE MOOR HOUSE GLASSHOUSE — 1993







Whitwell Hall



According to the 18th century Norfolk historian, the Rev. Blomefield, the history of the manors of Gambon and Whitwell Symonds (which includes today the areas of Whitwell Hall and Hackford Hall) can be traced back to Anglo Saxon times. The land is listed in the Domesday Book (1086) as being owned by Rolf de Bellofago who was given the land after the Norman conquest.

In 1659 Augustine Messenger held the Manors of both Whitwell and Hackford and in 1680 these were inherited by Robert Monsey who became Rector of Bawdeswell in 1683, In 1689 he was obliged to take an oath of allegiance and supremacy to the new King William but he declined to do this and he was subsequently deprived of the living at Bawdeswell. He was more fortunate than many other members of the clergy in that he owned a small but yet comfortable estate and so he retired to Whitwell to live. He was able to indulge in his passion for growing plants particularly oaks and some of the oak trees that he planted at Whitwell during these later years still survive in good order today.It was here that his son Messenger was born in 1693.

It is said that the eighteenth century was rich in "interesting physicians" and one of the most remarkable (and certainly the oddest) was Doctor Messenger Monsey. He is recorded as being uncouth, unwashed, able to deliver the most outrageous remarks and generally to behave in the most unseemly manner, was generally unpopular yet always tolerated on account of his wit and malice. He is mentioned in most of the contemporary records of the time.

Messenger spent his formative years at Whitwell being educated by his father until 1711 when he entered Pembroke College, Cambridge. He graduated B.A. in 1715 and returned to Norwich to study medicine. He finally settled down to practise at Bury St. Edmund's and might have remained there for the rest of his days had it not been for a fortunate accident which occurred when the second Earl of Godolphin was taken ill at Bury, on his way to his house at Newmarket.

Monsey was summoned to attend and the patient made a swift recovery although history does not record whether the recovery was fully or partly due to the professional ability of Messenger. Godolphin was a nobleman who was fond of a good talk and a quiet life and so delighted was he with the Doctor's conversation that he invited him to go and live with him. He also introduced him to all his friends and in due course obtained for him the post of non-resident physician at the Chelsea Hospital. Monsey was able to live at the Earl's house at St. Jame's in London.

In London this extraordinary Doctor from Norfolk, with his appalling manners and scathing tongue was a novelty and became an instant success in the broad social circle of friends of the Earl of Godolphin. He became a great friend of Sir Robert Walpole (who was the first person to hold the office of Prime Minister) and it is reputed that Messenger was the only man who dared to contradict him and to beat him at billiards.

The Doctor had a prodigious output of general verse and literature but his celebrity owed little to the pen but everything to his conversation and his habits. He never did anything in a common manner, when one of his teeth ached, he would tie it by a length of catgut to a perforated bullet and fire the bullet from a pistol: he claimed this method of dentistry to be painless and urged all his friends to remove their painful teeth in the same manner.

He never said anything unless it was unexpected or outrageous, his talk was vigorous and incessant, anecdotal, highly flavoured and crowded (like his letters) with classical quotations and deplorable puns. He was also reknowned as a teller of scurrilous after dinner stories once the ladies had retired and left the gentlemen to their port

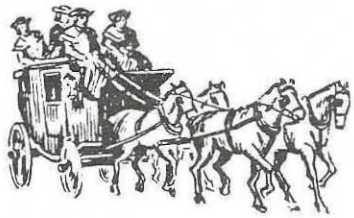
Lord Godolphin died in 1766 and none of Messenger's other patrons could quite endure the possibility of having him as a permanent resident in their houses. He had married when he lived at Bury but his wife was dead and his only child, Charlotte, was married to a linen-draper in London and was preoccupied with her large family. The idea of retiring and moving back to Whitwell was the very last thing he wanted to do so he had to leave St. Jame's and retire to apartments in Chelsea Hospital.

He continued to maintain his contacts and his remarks were as much quoted as ever; but he grew old and soured and intensely disagreeable, and his dress and general deportment became even more eccentric. He was much disliked at Chelsea particularly by the junior doctors who were eager for his post and salary. Messenger would aggravate them by refusing to give up the position and by saying that they would all die before him anyway: a statement which he did his best to fulfil by living to the age of ninety-five.

He became increasingly lonely as the years wore on, for he had by now outlived all his friends, and his scathing wit and

unpredictable conversation was too strong to be accepted or appreciated by this later era of London society. His daughter spent as much time as she could with him but this was limited as she had eleven children and a husband who was in business.

During these later years he maintained a regular correspondence with William Wiggett Bulwer of Heydon Hall, William lived only a few miles from the Whitwell estate and generally kept an eye on the place for Messenger. It is known that Messenger and Charlotte would occasionally visit Norfolk but it seems that whilst they would visit Whitwell they would always stay at Heydon, in any case the Hall would have a tenant living there. Travelling from London to Norfolk in the 18th century would have had its limitations and in these later years the old age and failing health of Messenger coupled with the family ties of Charlotte

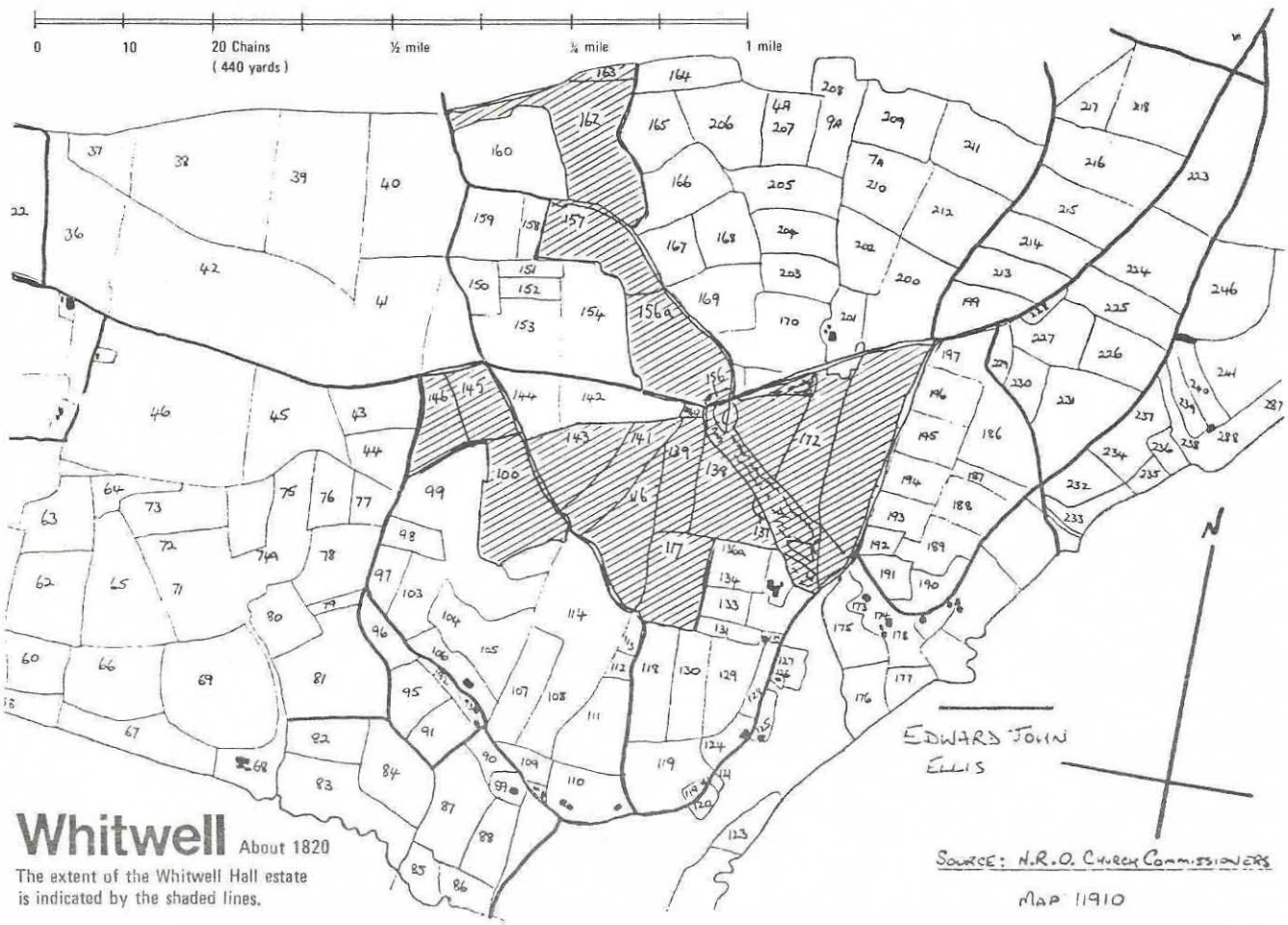


would have made journeys impossible. In 1767 he began these letters to William and they continued with the last one being written only a month before his death in December 1788.

Whilst outwardly he appeared the same disagreeable and awkward person he had always been, these letters displayed him in a mellower and less savage mood. Amid the wit and general buffoonery there runs a pleasant current of affection and kindness particularly for his daughter and especially for Mr. and Mrs. Bulwer and their daughters Molly and Sally.

He wrote of Heydon as the place "where I have always met with so much cordiality, pleasure and hospitality - for I do assure you I have passed no moments of my life with more satisfaction than at Heydon".

He died at Chelsea at the age of ninety-five, on the 26th December 1788. His will was worthy of him. It was nineteen pages long and was extremely detailed and complicated. He insisted, with elaborate and ghastly directions, that his body should be dissected and the remains thrown into the Thames. The recipients of his clothes were detailed down to his 'old shoe buckles'. Many people received sums of money ranging from Five Pounds To Six Hundred and Fifty Pounds but all his property and lands 'in the parishes of Whitwell and Hackford in the County of Norfolk' went to his daughter Charlotte. A complicated entail that the Whitwell estate should pass to her female children and to their issue only was included and it seems that Messenger's intention was to exclude the male line of the family from any long term inheritance.



Whitwell About 1820

The extent of the Whitwell Hall estate is indicated by the shaded lines.

Like her father, Charlotte did not appear to have lived at Whitwell Hall during the rest of her lifetime. She had eleven children and a husband who was in trade in London as a linen draper. Their home and business was firmly rooted in the Capital and there seemed little sense in moving up to a rural estate in Norfolk and so for a few years longer Whitwell Hall and its farms continued to be let to tenants. Fadens 1790 map of Norfolk marks the Hall as being occupied by a Mr. Thomas Cooke.

Charlotte only lived for a few more years and she died in 1798. Her eldest daughter Caroline inherited the Whitwell and Hackford Estates and on the 18th March 1800 she married John Bedingfield Collyer. John was the 2nd son of Daniel Collyer of Wroxham Hall and he and Charlotte moved into Hackford Hall. The Collyer family and their subsequent generations were to live at Hackford until Brigadier-General John Collyer left during the 1930's.

The exact date cannot be established but at this time the Whitwell Hall estate was sold by Caroline either just before or just after her marriage. In the Land Tax Return of 1801 for the parish of Whitwell the proprietor is shown as Edward John Ellis. The same Edward Ellis is listed in the Morningthorpe Return for 1800 so it is probable that he purchased the estate between April 1800 and March 1801. The Land Tax Return for Whitwell continues to record Edward Ellis as living at Whitwell until his death in February 1821.

His subsequent Will shows him to have been a somewhat wealthy man, he left a number of specific cash bequests totalling nearly £3000 with several bequests payable per week or per year for the rest of the life of the recipient.

The whole of the estate was left to his nephew James Ellis of Hackford with the provision for him to "be kind to his Father Arthur Ellis, if not the estate was to pay him an allowance of 20/- for the rest of his life". Unfortunately history does not record the actual outcome!

Also included in the Will was £100 to Robert Leamon the Younger of Fakenham who was also appointed as sole executor and was to be paid expenses and a reasonable allowance for carrying out the necessary executive duties.

James Ellis was a harness and collar maker (also the trade of Robert Leamon) who lived with his wife Alice and their eight children in a house on the corner of Reepham Market Place, on the site which was later occupied for so many years by Barclays Bank. James however declined to move into Whitwell and it was left to Robert Leamon as executor to find a tenant for the Hall and its surrounding arable and pasture land. The letting was advertised in the Norfolk Chronicle in early June 1821 and the Hall was initially occupied on an annual tenancy by Mr. Matthew Breese Copeman. However it was only eight months later that, in the same newspaper, the following notice appeared on five consecutive Saturdays in February and March 1822.

At The Angel Inn, Market Place, Norwich
this day 2nd March
between the hours of 3 and 5 in the afternoon
(unless sooner disposed of by Private Contract).

All that very desirable ESTATE called Whitwell Hall, in Whitwell, in the County of Norfolk, late the residence of Edward John Ellis, Gentleman deceased and now in the occupation of Mr. Matthew Breese Copeman, as tenant from year to year; comprising a capital Mansion House with attached and detached offices of every description, fit for the residence of a Genteel Family and 130 acres, three roods and 17 perches by survey, of excellent arable and pasture land, with barns, stables and every other requisite farm buildings, for the occupation of the same. Also a Messuage, now used as Cottages and a convenient and and well planted Tan Yard, containing 14 handlers, 17 vats, six taps with necessary limes and grainers, convenient drying shed, mill house, leather house, bark barns, stables and other outbuildings, requisite for carrying on the Tanning Trade.

The Mansion House contains an entrance hall, with keeping room, dining and drawing rooms, six bedrooms, three attics, kitchen, store room, good cellars and other domestic offices; it is situated on an eminence with a lawn in front surrounded by growing plantations, which inclose a trout stream, a greenhouse and large gardens, well planted with choice fruit trees, a capital orchard etc. The Estate may be viewed upon application to the tenant. Printed particulars and conditions of sale are ready for delivery and may be had of the Auctioneer and at the place of Sale and for price by Private Contract apply personally or by letter post paid to Mr James Ellis at Reepham or Mr Robert Leamon junior at Fakenham.

The Auction Sale did not however produce a buyer and Robert Leamon obviously felt the time had come to move up from the status of harness maker to that of country gentleman and so he purchased and duly moved into Whitwell Hall during the summer of 1822. This move was confirmed when the following notice appeared in the Norfolk Chronicle in November 1822.

Fakenham - To be sold by Auction on Wednesday 13th November The remaining parts of the valuable stock in trade of Messrs Leamon and Son, Saddlers, Collar and Harness Makers.
To be sold without reserve

ROBERT LEAMON
who bought the Whitwell Estate in 1822.

Robert purchased not just the Hall and its surrounding farmland but also one of the two Whitwell tanneries. The tannery had been an essential part of the Estate business since the 18th century and it was to remain so throughout the next 50 or more years. Robert's ownership introduced a period of considerable change at Whitwell.He enlarged and modernised the tannery during the 1840's He made sure the estate was properly farmed and also built up a thriving timber business. Robert was obviously a man of some wealth and in 1840 he pulled down most of the old red brick Hall and built in its place the white brick and slate roofed Regency style house that remains to this day. In 1842 he moved the road some 100 yards to the north and built a new carriage drive which ran to the front of the House.

On the southern boundary of the present park are some springs, the presence of which no doubt gave the origination of the name 'Whitwell'. The springs flow up from the chalk and if the surface chalk is disturbed the water runs a muddy white. In old English Whitwell means white spring. At the time of the enlargement of Whitwell Hall embankments were constructed to contain the flowing water and so some four hundred yards east of the Hall Robert constructed a reservoir (or spring pond) to supply the Hall with a supply of fresh water. Research has shown that at the eastern end and a few yards below the reservoir a brick lined pit was built to contain a hydraulic ram which was installed in 1842. This machine used a flow of water from the reservoir to pump a smaller quantity along 300 yards of lead piping up to a tank in the Hall. The water was (and still is) very hard and this quickly coated the inside of the pipe which in turn minimised the danger of lead poisoning. The rise from the ram to the tank was about 80 feet and it took ten gallons of flow to pump one gallon of water into the tank at the rate of one gallon each minute.

The reservoir, which originally supplied the Hall with all its water — very little of the original ram can be seen today, what is left is situated at a lower level and in the trees at the far left of the picture.

The original installation pumped the water into a large slate tank mounted on brick piers in the boiler room. Water was then piped to the kitchen and from here it was collected by the maids and carried by them to the parts of the Hall that required it. In later years tanks were installed in the attics and these were primarily used to supply the bathrooms and the flush lavatories.

The waste flow of water which drove the ram was channelled along the southern boundary of the Park and a dipping place was made with brick steps leading down to the water so that the families living in the Orwell Cottages could come with their pails to get the water they required for their domestic purposes; this was in everyday use until 1939.

The reservoir filled from the chalk springs it has always run constantly to overflow and has never been known to freeze over. It maintains a constant temperature of 10 degrees centigrade throughout all times of the year.

The ram supply was used for the Hall until 1970 when the increasing use of agricultural sprays in the arable field next to the reservoir was judged likely to pollute it.

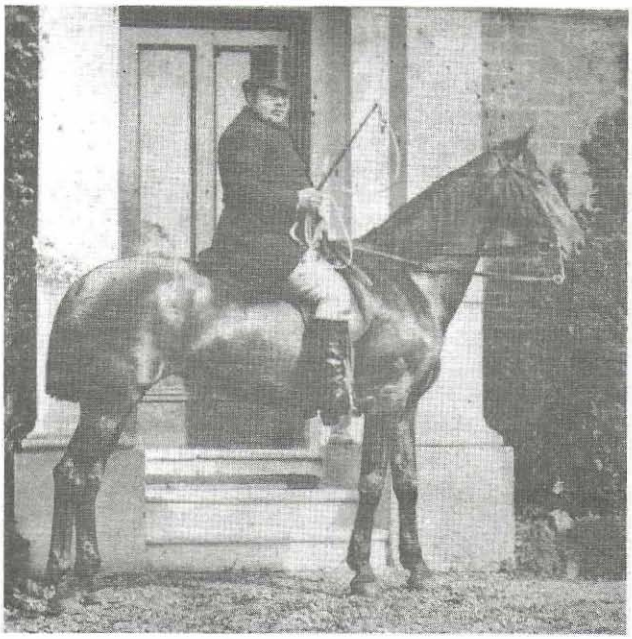
Robert's change of status in life to that of country gentleman was acheived by hard work and a shrewd ability to turn all aspects of the Estate into a profitable business. He died on the 7th March 1853 and was succeeded by his eldest son, also named Robert.

In his lifetime Robert (2nd) was to greatly enhance his inheritance and also to enjoy a reputation as a considerable personage. He owned an estate of nearly 800 acres and his business interests thrived. He was involved in politics and was the sponsor for Clare Sewell Read, a well known Norfolk MP of the time. He was also secretary to the group of country gentlemen who in 1850, erected by means of public subscription, the large Corinthian column erected as a monument to the memory of Thomas Coke at Holkham Hall. He is also known to have had a financially lucrative contract to supply timber to the Government, probably for the Navy and he bought large amount's of oak from other Norfolk estate's such as Felbrigg. He must have had considerable capital available to be involved in and to sustain such a venture.

Robert had obviously inherited some of his fathers business acumen and he continued to take the Leamon family through a period of financial prosperity, a period that was to eventually decline and end so unhappily a few years after his unfortunate death in 1878.

Whilst there were a number of reasons for the decline in the family fortunes they can be initially traced to a disastrous fire which occurred in 1874. The fire which burned for three days destroyed the many stacks of tan bark which stood in a yard near to the tannery; some of the tannery buildings were also burnt down. The tan bark was not insured and to replace this and also to update the tannery Robert had to borrow capital.

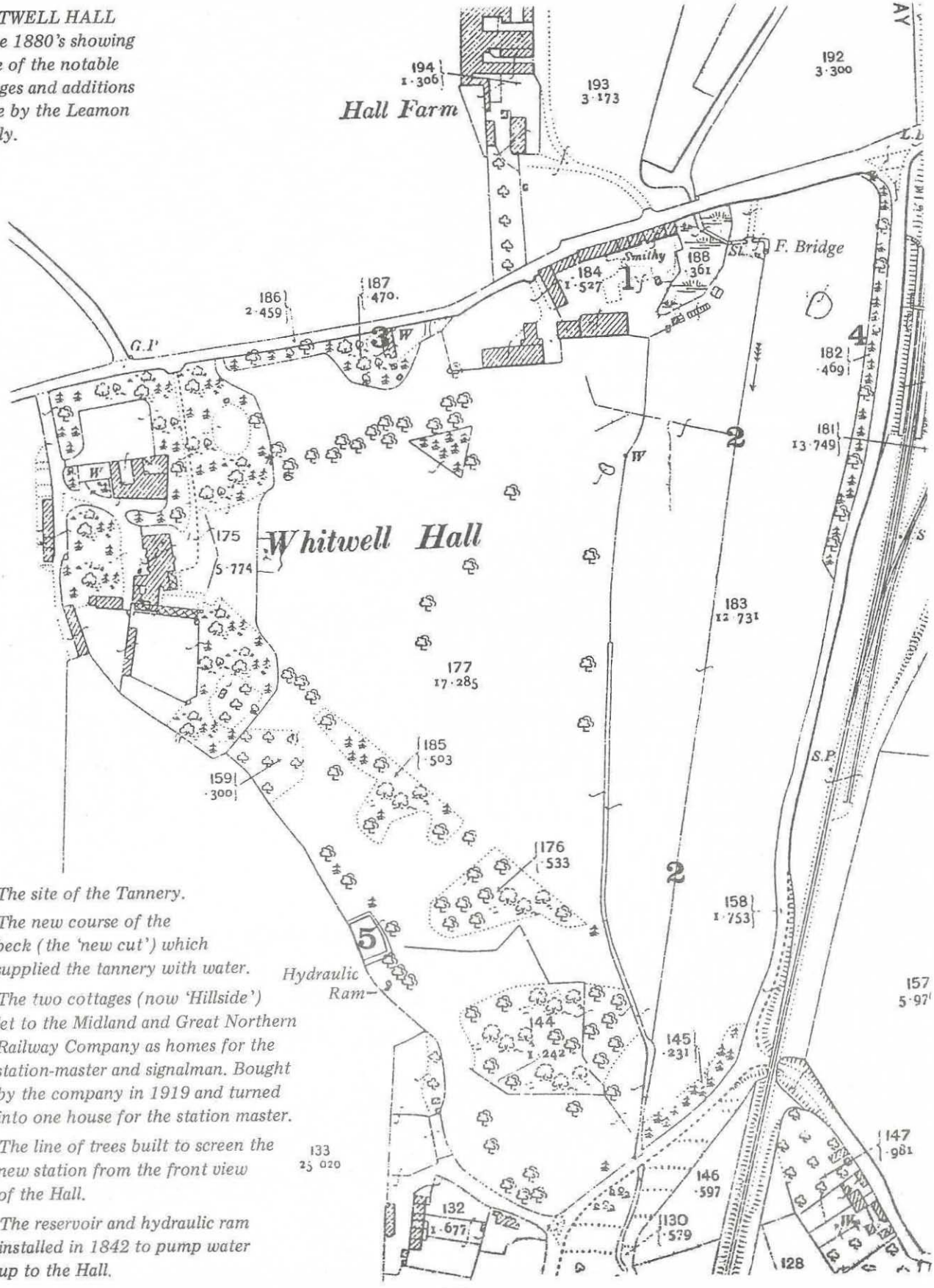
Skins for tanning had to be obtained from slaughterhouses and these mainly came from Norwich where most of the completed



ROBERT LEAMON (2nd)

MARY GILL
Wife of Robert Leamon (2nd)

WHITWELL HALL in the 1880's showing some of the notable changes and additions made by the Leamon family.



1. *The site of the Tannery.*
2. *The new course of the beck (the 'new cut') which supplied the tannery with water.*
3. *The two cottages (now 'Hillside') let to the Midland and Great Northern Railway Company as homes for the station-master and signalman. Bought by the company in 1919 and turned into one house for the station master.*
4. *The line of trees built to screen the new station from the front view of the Hall.*
5. *The reservoir and hydraulic ram installed in 1842 to pump water up to the Hall.*

leathers were transported back with much of the trade going directly to the shoe manufacturers. The untreated skins were delivered to Whitwell in relatively small loads by carriers carts and this slow and limited form of transport was unable to compete with the new railways. The extension of the Victorian railway system enabled hides to be transported quickly and in bulk. Small country tanneries began therefore to suffer from serious competition at this time from the large urban tanneries notably in Bermondsey. Much of the work in the larger tanneries was helped by machinery whilst the local tanneries output was acheived almost wholly by labour intensive means. Robert realised that his tannery was becoming uncompetitive and with the additional burden of the 1874 fire he decided not to just rebuild and replace his loss but to modernise the overall tannery enterprise. Money for the venture had to be raised and it appears that Robert borrowed from a local group of businessmen known as the Springfield Group of trustees.

In retrospect it is ironic that the coming of the railways was the death knell of the country tanneries yet Robert sold some of the Estate land to the Midland and Great Northern Railway to enable Whitwell Station to be built in 1883. When it was sold Robert insisted on the condition that the M and GN plant trees along the new line of the road to screen the sight of the new station from the Hall. The trees subsequently planted were Scots Pines; they grew quickly and fulfilled the screening condition. Most of them remain standing today.

The front of WHITWELL HALL (in the 1880's) looking towards the east; Robert Leamon (1st) built the Hall in the 1840's and also constructed a new carriage drive which led to the front of the building. This was closed up in the 1920's and since then all traffic has used the rear driveway only.

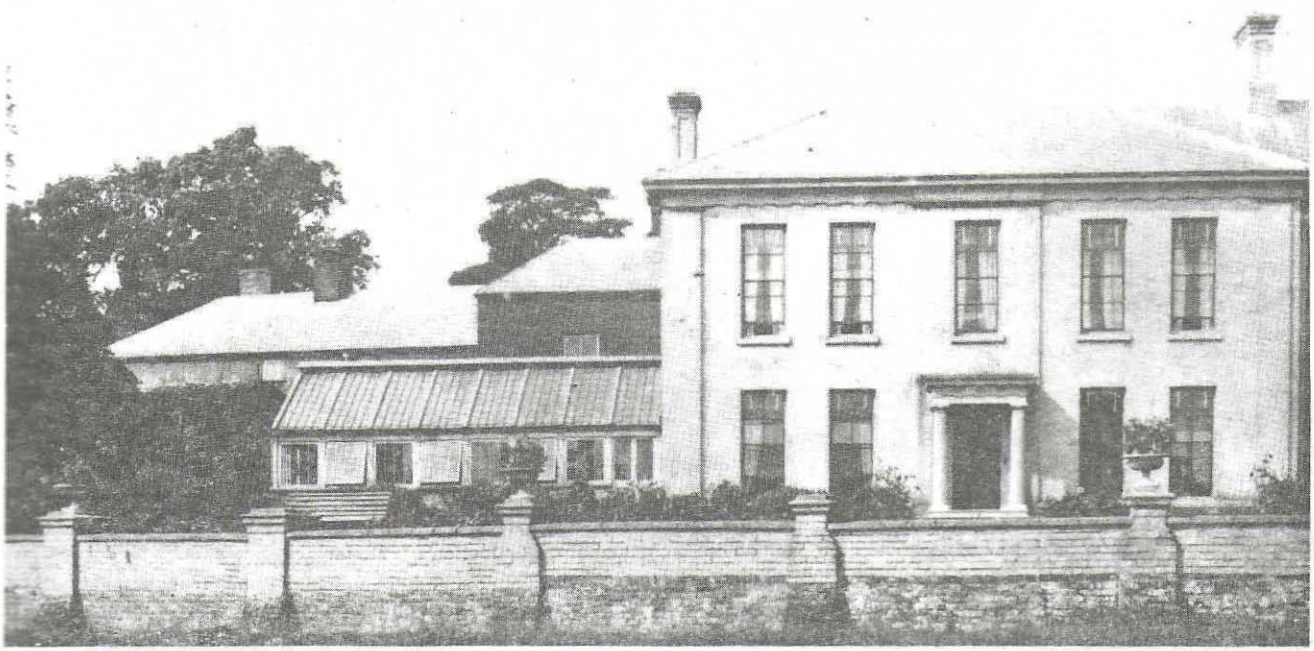
He greatly extended the Tannery by making additions of other tan pits, drying sheds and by building in 1876-77 an engine house fitted with a steam engine. This was used to grind the bark which was essential to make the tan liquor in which the hides were steeped. The outflow from the skin washing and particularly when the tan pits were cleansed gave off a dreadful odour, so Robert moved the course of the beck further to the east of the Hall by having a new course dug out. This is still referred to locally as the 'new cut'.

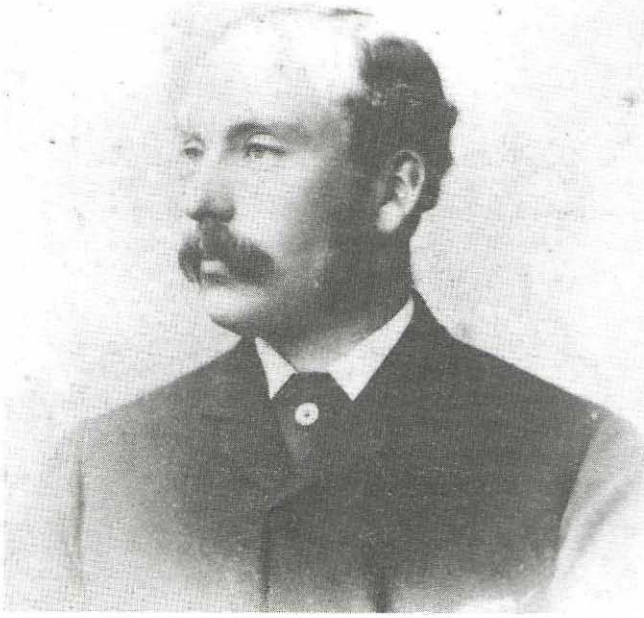
Despite all the investment business did not upturn and the local community, and his family, were all greatly shocked at the severe loss when Robert committed suicide in August 1878. He hanged himself in one of the Whitwell Hall bedrooms. He was succeeded by his son Phillip.

Phillip was unable to stop the decline and the Leamon fortunes went from bad to worse with the whole enterprise eventually being declared bankrupt in 1883. Phillip went to India to try and recoup the fortune but he didn't succeed; whilst he was away his wife remained at the Hall until 1887 when the Springfield Trustees foreclosed and she and her family were forced to leave. Her six small children were placed in the care of various relatives,and she went to live in Norwich. Sadly, the considerable strain these years placed upon her affected her mental condition and she finished her life in an asylum.

The three generations of the Leamon family who lived at Whitwell all had large families and today their descendents are widely scattered throughout the world. In recent years Tony Ivins has enjoyed a correspondence with branches of the family living in Canada, Tasmania and in many parts of this country.

The Springfield Trust retained the ownership of the Estate for the next 40 years and the Hall was let to various tenants. In December 1921 Mr. C. Barton bought the Estate but by 1925 he





PHILLIP LEAMON — taken in 1879
a year after he inherited the estate from his father.

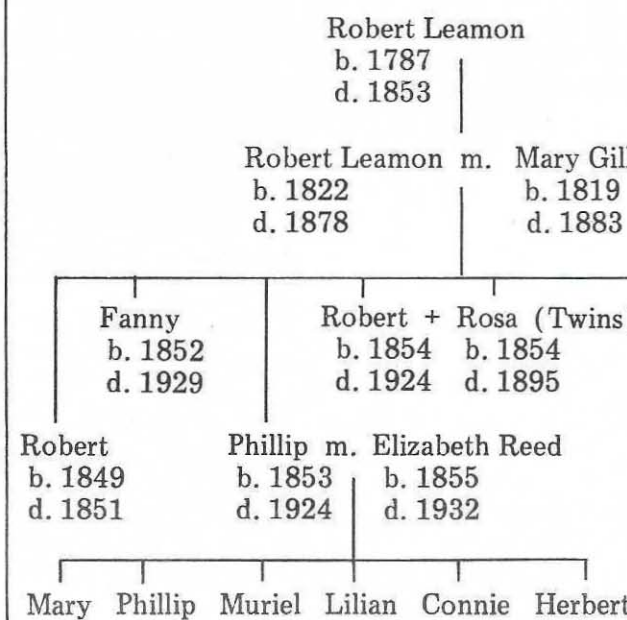
had sold the 320 acre Hall Farm to Mr. Arthur Stimpson and also sold to Capt.E.H.Barclay the Hall and 40 acres of parkland. Capt. Barclay lived at Whitwell with his wife and three daughters until 1937 when he inherited Colney Hall and subsequently moved there.

The property was then sold to Forest School Ltd (1928) Ltd. (a private company registered as an educational charity) which has owned the Hall to this day. Forest School had outgrown its original premises in the New Forest and they moved to Norfolk in the Spring of 1938. The school remained here until early 1940 when the threat of invasion along the North Norfolk coast caused the children and teaching staff to be evacuated to south Devon. The Army requisitioned the Hall shortly afterwards and they remained here until late 1945.

The School did not return but a Forest School Camp was held during the Summer of 1947 and during the next 20 years the Hall was increasingly used for Easter and Summer holiday camps and for staff training courses. In 1965 tented camps and house accommodation was offered to schools during term time and this pattern of term time activity and holiday camps continues today as the Whitwell Hall Country Centre.

Tony Ivins joined the staff of Forest School when it moved to Whitwell in 1938 and apart from war service with the RAF from 1940 -46 he has been actively engaged with the School to this present day. Suzanne Dommen joined the school staff in the summer of 1939 and Suzanne and Tony were married in 1946 and made Whitwell their home.

Brian and Sue Evans assisted by Paul Mortimer are now responsible for the management of camps and house-parties and also for the Estate. Tony still maintains an active interest as he is chairman of the company directors.



THE LEAMON FAMILY
at Whitwell Hall 1822 - 1887

Robert had married Mary Gill in 1847 and like most other Victorian families of this period they had a large family; their first child a son was born in 1849 and ten more children followed during the next twelve years. The first son was called Robert (as had been the first son of the previous three generations). Sadly he died at the age of two and the Estate was in time inherited by the next eldest son Phillip, who was born in 1853. Another son was born into the family in 1854 and he was subsequently christened Robert.

In the Whitwell Road cemetery there is a large memorial to Robert and his wife Mary and also to their 11 children. On the other side of the cemetery and almost parrallel to this memorial is the family grave of the Collyer family. It is perhaps ironic that the two families who lived and worked as neighbours should end with their final resting places so close together.

MRS PHILLIP LEAMON with her six children; Mary the eldest looks about 8 years old and so the picture was taken about 1889 some two years after the family had left Whitwell Hall.

The three eldest children with their mother, nurse and Mr Preston the coachman. Taken in 1884 it also includes a lady, at the back of the trap, whose name is unknown although it is probably one of Mrs Phillip Leamon's sisters-in-law.

Members of the Whitwell Hall Staff in the late 1870's

The large memorial to Robert, Mary and their 11 children in the foreground . . . the family grave of the Collyer family may also be seen almost directly in the background.

WHITWELL HALL 1993

The outline of the Conservatory from the 1880 picture can be seen on the side wall of the main building.

The Cawston Duel

Sir Henry Hobart of Blickling Hall was a Norfolk baronet and had been M.P. for Kings Lynn in 1681. He was a strong supporter of the Revolution of 1688 against James II and was later to fight in Ireland with the army of William III and was with him in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. He was again M.P. for the County in 1695, but lost his seat in 1698. There seems little doubt that some election squabble caused the famous Cawston duel fought in August of that year.

Oliver Le Neve, his successful opponent was born about 1663. Although the family name was an old one in the County of Norfolk it was not one of the nobility, in fact his father was an upholsterer who came to London to follow his trade. Oliver benefited in finance and also in position when his kinsman and namesake Oliver Neve of Great Witchingham, who had also been a London tradesman, left him a considerable property, which allowed him to be sent to Oxford to be educated.

After leaving Oxford he moved back to Norfolk and lived for some time at Mannington Hall and whilst here he married into two well placed Norfolk families. Firstly to Anne Gawdy (the daughter of Sir John Gawdy) who died in childbirth and secondly, in June 1698, to Jane, the daughter of Sir John Knyvet of Ashwellthorpe. Oliver's honeymoon, therefore, was hardly over when the quarrel which ended so fatally took place.

The cause of the dispute seems to have been some remarks which Oliver Le Neve was said to have made that Hobart was a coward and had shown himself to be so when he was fighting in Ireland. It seems that these remarks were made shortly after Sir Henry Hobart had lost his local seat as an M.P. but at the time Le Neve denied that it was he who had made them and Le Neve seems to have written denying the truth of the allegation. Hobart would not accept this denial and he went to Reepham and insinuted publicly that Le Neve wrote the letter to avoid fighting him. Le Neve felt his honour had been sullied and wrote back with a challenge for a duel

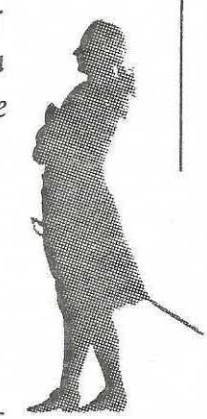
"Honored Sir,

I am very sorry I was not at Reifham yesterday, when you gave yorself the trouble of appearing there, that I might not only have further justified the Truth of my not saying what is reported I did, but that I might have told you that I wrote not that Letter to avoid fighting you; but that, if the credit of yor author has confirmd you in the belief of it, I am ready and desirous to meet you when and where you please to assign. If otherwise, I expect your Author's name in return for this, that I may take my satisfaction there; or else conclude the Imputacon sprung from Blickling, and send you a time and place; for the matter shall not rest as it is, tho' it cost the life of

Yor Servant,

OLIVER NEVE.

Aug. ye 20th, '98



The duel was very quickly organised and it took place the next day on Saturday 21st August 1698 and was no doubt a fierce one, for Hobart ran Le Neve through the arm and Le Neve, who was a left handed fencer, hit Hobart in the belly and seriously wounded him. Henry Hobart died the next day and was buried at Blickling on 26th August. Apparently no monument to his memory was erected at Blickling but a stone memorial was erected on the duel site., The stone was paid for by Mr. W. Wiggett-Bulwer of Wood Dalling and remains to this day.

Henry Hobart had nine children, one little girl being only two months old at the date of the duel. His wife survived him less than three years, dying of consumption in August, 1701.

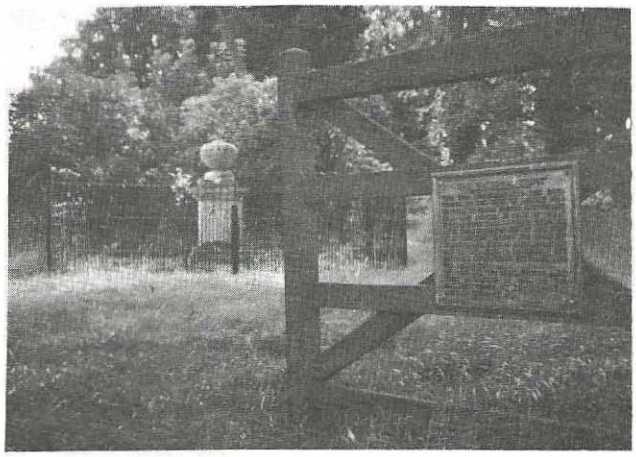
Le Neve recognising that the County influence of the Hobart family was too great for him, left the country immediately and went to Rotterdam. Ways and means for the fugitive's keep in Holland were raised by a sale of goods by Robert Fisher, who wrote to him on 23rd January 1699, that he could only raise £100. Oliver's newly married wife seems to have stood by him for she sent a message by the same letter that "she will be very kind to you, and desires you would write to her often, and desired to see you safe at Witchingham again".

It was suggested through supporters in England that Court influence for an acquittal should be brought to bear, through Lord Rochford who Le Neve was to meet at his country house in Holland. Although this meeting had to wait until Lord Rochford found time to visit his foreign estate. In March 1699 the Hobart's were moving against Le Neve for their kinsmans' death and the matter of the duel was considered at the Thetford Assizes. Although no decision was offered by the Coroner to Le Neve's immediate prospects it was accepted that he had "innumerable friends and supporters in the County".

During the next few months Le Neve had to rely heavily on the support given by his friends and family and many items were sent over to him. Bedding and horses were sent to Holland in March and April and in May his friend Robert Fisher sent him 12 dozen "nog", a potent Norfolk ale forwarded to him in hampers. In July Le Neve was living under the name of Mr. Davyes and by now had bought a house in Rotterdam and his wife had joined him there.

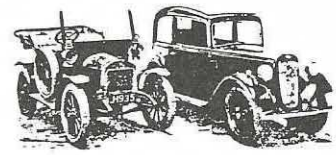
During the Autumn efforts were made by his friends to get a favourable judgement for him and in December he was advised to surrender himself, for "if the Sheriff forbear proclaiming him it would be too great a favour, and might prejudice him thereafter, as his enemies may challenge the jury on the ground of partiality". Ultimately he came back to England, and was acquitted, to the great joy of his friends, in early April, 1700.

Oliver Le Neve died of apoplexy, at the age of 48, in November 1711 having survived the duel thirteen years. A great sportsman and greater drinker, the open-air life of a country gentleman probably kept him alive longer than might have been expected.



The Cawston duel was the last recored duel fought in Norfolk, it was well chronicled and publicised at the time and in particular because there was considerable feeling that Oliver Le Neve was not at fault. Henry Hobart should have accepted the letter of apology - he didn't and this subsequently led to his tragic end. The duel stone was erected on land which eventually became part of the grounds of the former Woodrow Inn and in 1964 the stone was given to the National Trust.

In an Austin Seven



The "bus" is waiting -step inside!
We're off! by Aylsham Road we glide;
The sun is bright, the day is clear,
Northward our baby car we steer.
Blue sky! fresh breeze! an ideal day!
We'll trip it to Holt and Cromer way.

By Horsford's tangled woods we bend,
Where dancing light and shadows blend.
'Mid oaks and firs on every hand,
Through the green glades of Haveringland;
Where scenes of charm and beauty hide,
Least known of Norfolk's countryside.

Here Cawston Church comes into view,
It's square tower bold against the blue,
Whilst Salle above the woodlands high,
Points with grey fingers to the sky.

So speed we on our coastward way,
By lanes new decked with opening may,
And on by rising lands until,
We mount the steep of Edgefield Hill.

Now the fair scene, expanding wide,
Delights - at slackened pace we glide.

These busy folk and windows gay -
'Tis Holt Stock sale and market day!
No lingering, though to stay we're fain,
We petrol up and start again.

Here sweep the strong sea winds and stir
The towering larch, the spruce, the fir;
Around us, yellow gorse and broom
Have graced the heath with scented bloom;
There, wide o'er Kelling's trackless ways,
Nature her gorgeous robe displays,
With all the tints of morning spread,
Purple and gold and rosy red.

Now the North Sea! some glimpses fine,
We mark its far horizon line;
And here, beneath our very eyes
A scene of matchless beauty lies;
By mile on mile, the ferny glades
Dip to a dell of woodland shades,
A charming spot, beloved and famed,
And "Pretty Corner" aptly named.

Now eastwards bends our road and we
Glide down by woodland ways, to see
How the high rhododendrens fair
Bloom bright with blended colours rare.

Sheringham pleads, we fain would stay
To watch the rippling wavelets play
Along its sunny beach; but no,
Cromer's our aim and there we go.

Up by more may-decked roads we wind,
Leave Beeston and its cliffs behind;
On, by The Runtons, on we speed,
And curb at last our fiery steed
Just in the midst of Cromer Town,
And to a quiet tea sit down.

Later, a brief stroll up the rise
To stretch and view the sunset skies,
That arching o'er the ocean dim
Bend down to touch its golden rim.

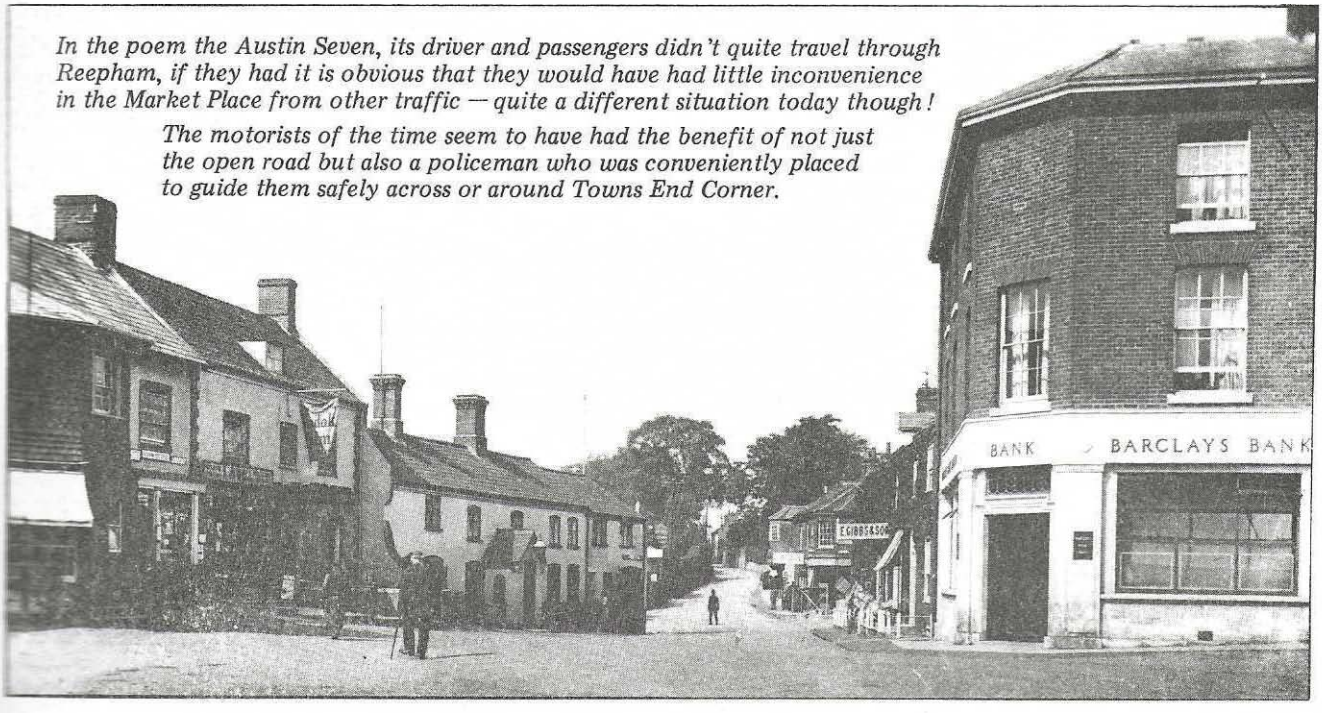
The western light of evening falls
On church tower, cliffs, hotels and halls;
Cromer, more fair ne'er seemed to be-
"Set like a jewel in the sea".

Just a brief spin, one ne'er forget,
And every turn a beauty spot.

Norwich, 1931. E.H.

In the poem the Austin Seven, its driver and passengers didn't quite travel through Reepham, if they had it is obvious that they would have had little inconvenience in the Market Place from other traffic — quite a different situation today though!

The motorists of the time seem to have had the benefit of not just the open road but also a policeman who was conveniently placed to guide them safely across or around Towns End Corner.



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