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# REEPHAM

## Just would not die

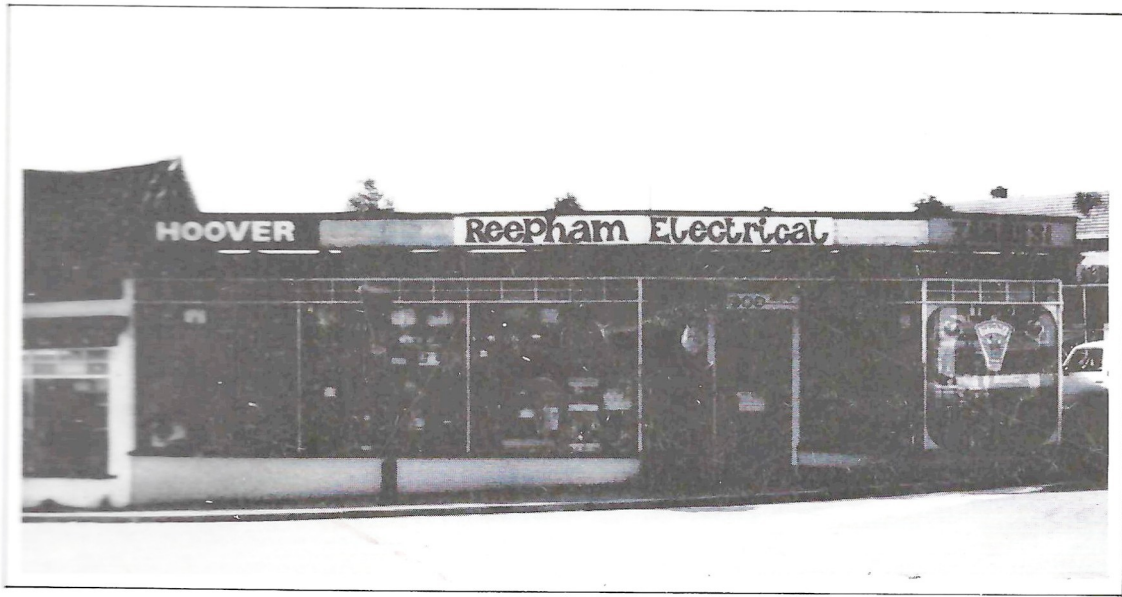
REV. A. G. ALLCOCK

A week or so ago, I was in Aylsham, when a gentleman approached me with the request, "Can you tell me the way to Reepham please?" My reply was instinctive, "Yes, I certainly can, but why Reepham?" He explained that he was going home to Sheffield, having spent a week on the broads, he thought that it would make a change from his usual route. My rather impertinant reply made me think. You see, I had spent my early years in that town, some fifty years ago. I remembered it as a thriving, lively market town, standing as it did between two busy railway stations, having prosperous businesses and an active community life. My wife and I have visited Reepham over the post war years only to see it die, the stations closed and virtually no bus service to replace the loss in public transport. In fact, on one occasion, my wife and son went there, some friends taking them there by car, only to find that they had gone on the wrong day for a bus. They finished up walking to Cawston before they could get a taxi to take them to Aylsham. This grieved me, because my childhood memories were of easy accessibility. I, together with other boys, used to commute to The City of Norwich School from Whitwell Station, on the old Midland and Great Northern Railway, whilst Reepham Station was part of The London and North Eastern network. It was there that Stimpson's the corn merchants had their warehouse and the coal merchants plied their trade.

The Cattle Market was a busy Centre, animals arriving at both stations, as well as from the local farms. Wednesdays were great days for the boys. After school it was a race to do one or more things. First of all, one went either to the market or to the station, a penny or tuppence was great reward for the pleasure of helping to drive the cattle into the pens or loading them on to the train. Secondly, Wednesday was the day when "the pictures" came. A travelling cinema show was put on in the parish hall. If you ran fast enough, you could help to set out the benches and chairs. The prices were 2d, 4d and 6d, for helping, you got in free. Consequently, Tom Mix and Pearl White were the hero and heroine in the school playground for the next week, as the episode was re-enacted. The third activity was to get to one of the public houses, where the farmers stabled their horses. If you were lucky, you could help in harnessing the horses into the carts and traps. This was the most lucrative. Sometimes the farmer was carried out by the landlord, put in the cart, the reins were tied to the front board and with a good slap on the rump the horse took the farmer home.

There were a lot more farmers in those days. Reepham was surrounded by large estates with their tenant farmers and many others farming one to two hundred acres in their own right. Therefore a lot of men were employed in the mixed farming of the area; specialised, mechanical farming had not yet arrived.

Reepham was a Centre. Eglinton's the Agricultural Engineers, was a place of great activity. Sidney Eglinton, or "Togo" as he was affectionately called, was all things to all men. He provided his own Saw Mill, Blacksmith's Shop



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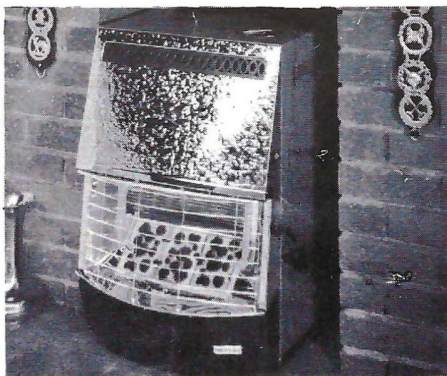
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(which did much more than just shoe horses), Tinsmith's Shop, Wheelwright's Shop, Carpenter's and Undertaking Business — the lot. Tractors and cars were coming into being; a Garage had been opened, opposite the Sun Barn Pit. I think that it was owned by a Mr. White, but it was Squire Abbs who was known as the authority on the new fangled internal combustion engine. In fact, he was the first man to invent a mechanical device for the dipping of electric light head lamps. People like, Cocking the Shoemaker, 'Stitcher' King the Breeches maker, Paske the Tailor, a prosperous Sadler, with Gibbs the Ironmonger, all made for a hive of industry. Like many areas in Norfolk, there was a larger population, which called for Grocers, Chemists, Clothing Stores, Butchers, Bakers and other trades now gone.

Reepham has always been unique in another way. It has two Churches in the same churchyard. In fact there were once three; the ruin of the third still there. In my younger days they were both used. One served Whitwell and Hackford whilst the other served Reepham and Kerdistone, thus covering the four parishes which make up the area. On one occasion, during a period of drought, one of the churches had arranged a Garden Party and were praying for fine weather to continue, whilst the other congregation were praying for rain to end the drought. That set the Almighty a problem, it's a good thing that the weather does not rely on men. There were three Chapels too. The Wesleyan Methodists on Station Road, The Primitive Methodists on Bawdswell Road, whilst in Fishers Lane the United Methodists worshipped. The concern for moral and spiritual values did not end there, a very thriving Band of Hope Temperance Hall had been built on the Whitwell Road, at the back of a lovely old 13th century house, which still stands in Back Street. The town was always Ecumenical, fifty years ago united services were held in the Market Place, all denominations sharing in the evangelical



zeal, with united choirs and the Temperance Band providing the music. I understand that the same spirit exists today, as the Parish Church Chancel is used by the Roman Catholics for the celebration of Mass. There is only one Chapel now, the Temperance Hall has been pulled down and one of the Churches used for worship, the other has been converted into a Parish Hall. I have watched the shops close and magnificent old houses become empty. Many of the farms in the area have gone as separate units; in fact the area nearly died.

Enough of nostalgia, sufficient for me to say that my encounter in Aylsham made me go back, this time to stop, look and listen. One of the first people that I met was Margery Gibbs, her family had kept the Ironmongers. I discovered that she has written a most informative pamphlet called 'I Remember' telling the story of Reepham Market Place at the turn of the century. It is in the County Library, the Local History Section. Well worth getting out and reading. In the Church I found a very interesting guide

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and history of the three Churches, therefore, I have no intention of repeating either of these, but rather to tell what I found today. I was delighted to learn from Margery that there is a very active Reepham Society. The Secretary is Mr. Russell Vincent of Hackford Vale, Reepham, if you are interested, I'm sure he would be delighted to hear from you.

I therefore decided to go down to Whitwell, to a place called Jordon, in fact, where an Uncle of mine farmed at Faulkards Farm. I knew that it was virtually a ruin, but I was thrilled to find that it is now being used as a Centre for Endeavour Training, under the Norfolk Committee of that National organisation. Turning back to the town, I called in at Whitwell Hall, the Barclay family had lived there. Once more I had good news, for I met Mr. A.H. Ivins who is now the Warden of a well used and popular Country Centre. In 1938 The Forest Independent Co-ed Boarding School, moved up to the hall from Godshill, in Hampshire. When the war came this in turn was evacuated and the Army occupied the building. Mr. Ivins returned from his wartime service, found changed circumstances and, with vision and foresight founded the present organisation.



On again, past the empty Whitwell Railway Station, where on the left I saw the new Reepham High School, straddling a lane, down which we used to be taken for 'Nature Walks' from the Elementary School, where I went as a child. This I found had been enlarged and obviously has a larger staff than Mr. & Mrs. Chute Thompson, Miss K.D.L. Barrett and Miss I. Hall. My grandfather's cottage garden had bungalows built on it, as had Robins Lane. Sun Barn Pit has disappeared and a new Fire Station occupies the site, whilst behind that building stand some unique bungalows. Some time ago, The Reepham Housing Trust was formed,

## **G. GRIEF**

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to provide special accommodation for the physically handicapped. I found the present Chairman, Mrs. Agnes Orton, at The Chimes, a delightful shop in the corner of the market place. She prides herself on the quality of her coffee. The Sun Barn had signs of activity and I was



surprised to find that it now housed a Bow Maker and Fletcher, a Guitar Maker and Handmade Leather Bag Manufacturer. Talking about new crafts in the area I found a blind Basket Maker and a Potter, the latter unfortunately leaving Reepham because they cannot find suitable premises in which to expand.

As I came to Town End, as we called it, I found a new firm, Reepham Electrical. This occupies the buildings previously housing Paske the Tailors and the shop run by his daughters. The old hut, which was the Tailors' Shop had been the original area taken over by Messrs. Samuel Phillips and Robert Webster, whose initiative and hard work have enabled them to occupy the whole corner site, providing a most comprehensive Electrical Supply and Servicing business. Being the agents of Hoover and Zunnussi equipment, they cover a wide range of domestic, agricultural and refrigeration requirements. Talking to these two young men, I found that they covered an extremely wide area, not only in Norfolk, but into Cambridgeshire as well. In fact they were off to Kings Lynn looking for premises to form another branch. It would look good, if in years to come their literature read, Head Office, Reepham, Norfolk. On the opposite side of the road I met Mr. Grief. He and his wife run the corner shop. His greatest concern was the inadequacy of the road to take the large loads carried by lorries, as they seek to take the corner from Station Road into the Bawdswell Road or Dereham Road as they now call it. Whilst there, I popped up to the old cattle market site, to find a new car park, free, so that, when I went into the market place and had ample room to park my car there, I wondered why people ever went to the cities to shop. Hence, I looked round the market place to miss many things, but to discover others: a good butchers, antique shop, druggists and what I can best express as an Emporium. My word, what a stock. I am sure that if you ask for it, they will find it for you. Mr. Johnson, a Liverpoolian, has transformed two premises into an Aladdin's Cave.

Standing at the back of the market place is a house, which I have known for many years, The Old Brewery. I never remember it being used for the purpose from which it takes its name, but was a private house, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bircham. I knew that it had been empty for a long time, and was delighted when I found out that, about eight years ago, a Mr. and Mrs. Raynes had bought it to turn it into an Hotel. What a transformation, without spoiling it in any way, the Georgian character of the building it has been extended in such a way as to provide a banqueting room, which is used in many different ways. In fact, it is true to say that The Old Brewery Hotel has become the Social Centre for the whole district. Not only

is it used for the usual functions, but Band Concerts, Lectures and meetings of all descriptions are held there. Egan Ronay speaks highly of both cuisine and accommodation. As I moved down the road towards the Church I was pleased to see one of the cottages now being used as a Homemade Confectioners and Health Food Shop. On Eglington's old site another firm, F. Randell & Co. is flourishing. I spent some time talking to Mr. Reggie Randell and I soon discovered that I was in the presence of a man well known and respected in the world of agriculture. Randells had taken over from the Eglingtons in the early 30's and have transformed the business from the old style of Blacksmiths and Agricultural Engineers, to one meeting the highly technological and scientific requirements of horticulture and agriculture. Besides this they have entered into the supply of domestic heating, radio, television and gardening equipment. As I had lived in that part of the town, I naturally gravitated towards the old George & Dragon public house. Another of the old hostleries closed down, but was taken over and used as a Gallery, by a Mr. Dennis King. I was pleased to find that he had not spoilt the old stabling, but it has made a wonderful setting for the display of prints and paintings. On talking to him I realised that I had come across a rare craftsman, as he is one of a small international band of 'Fore-Edge Artists'. This involves the decoration of the leading edges in books, so that, when the pages are fanned, a delightful illustration is revealed. On the other side of the road, I came across another gentleman, Mr. Reg. Kiley, who, when he left school, was apprenticed to a cabinet maker. He finished up working in the London Docks, because the money was much better. However, when the docks were re-organised, he came to the conclusion that he would rather take his severance pay, revert to his old skill and coming to Reepham he began to make what he calls boxes. What a misnomer, for he is making cases for anglers, in which they carry their fishing flies and fly-tying equipment. He and his wife, Jean, are now sending their products far afield, supplying such firms as Hardies of London. I understand that this firm has presented H.R.H. Prince Charles with one of the boxes, made in Reepham by Mr. Kiley.

I soon realised that there was a lot of new property in Reepham and my wanderings led me to an area known as Ollands Road. I looked for one house in particular, Oppenheim House. This had been known previously as Ryder House, and had, I believe, been used by Ryder Haggard, but Phillip Oppenheim had written his best sellers there. I checked on this with an old friend of his, and his reply was great: "Ar, he didanall bor," he said, "I helped ta moave him in when Oi was a youngun". This house later became known as Reepham House, I believe, and eventually took the name of The Ollands. It has now completely disappeared and a modern estate of tasteful bungalows occupy the site. Before leaving, however, I looked for just one more memory, a house which I knew as 'The Limes'. A local artist had lived there by the name of Miss Bartle. I eventually found it, renamed 'Orchard House'. How pleased I was to find that, Miss Bartle's old studio, was now being used by Sally Aitchison as a showroom in which she displays the Oriental Rugs which she renovates with such skill.

I could write much more, but time and space disciplines me, but I hope that I have said enough to make you want to visit this lovely town.

I must thank all those who made me so welcome, and who, by their faith, hope and love, have not only kept the place alive, but given it a new lease.

*Miss Bartle*

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