

Frost's and Collison's – business or tradition?

The white-aproned boy will never again wheel out his grocery-laden trade bike from Frost's shop in Station Road as the *Eastern Daily Press* told us and we will never again see the craftsman and his boy lead the horse and cart laden with building materials and trot out of the yard of Collison Bros. Builders at The Moor, Reepham. Both these businesses came to the end of their long active lives during 1985. It is not worth me commenting further on the closure of Mrs. Lily Frosts' shop as the reporter from the EDP covered it well and the Collison Bros. business was concluded with an auction of the remaining building materials on Saturday, 22nd September. Like Mrs. Frost's shop which was put up for sale, the business of Collison's had been up for sale for some time. The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. J. Williams, had hoped that someone would buy the yard, the materials and the goodwill and take it over as a going concern. It is perhaps a sign of the times that there was plenty of interest but nothing positive at the end of the day. It seems that these days you don't have to have a yard full of materials to be a builder.

Like Frost's shop, Collison's yard tucked away off Reepham Moor contained many tools, articles, fittings and materials which are now more at home in museums and antique shops. In the weeks before the sale much time was devoted to the cleaning and sorting of the various buildings and many items were discovered that had lain hidden under benches for many years. A box of nails may not be exciting, but to be told and to realise that they were put there "before the last war" does give a feel of the history of the place. It is sad to think that today those nails would cost new 10–20p each and you have just found about 30 lb of them and then to listen at the auction and hear someone buy them cheaply at a maiden bid for little more than scrap value.

Nobody these days wants cast iron pipes and gutters – it's all easy-fit, light-to-carry plastic and who would really want to buy pit saws, wooden brick hods, a spade for getting handmade bricks out of the kiln, well chains, a sign telling you that Fairways Garage will be opening shortly and all the other items that have been accumulated for a long time, perhaps up to 100 years?

In a way the auction turned out to be quite a local affair with much of the stock knocked down to other builders in Reepham by the town's auctioneer, Mr. K. Ewing. Former employees turned up for a mardle and although bargains were anticipated and achieved, brisk bidding on some articles probably averaged things out with the buyers and seller both fairly pleased at the end of the day. The buildings which have served well for so long are to be taken down, the site cleared, and houses are to be built on it. It is perhaps ironic yet pleasing in some way that the site that has served for so long in the Reepham building trade is now to give further work to local builders in its demise.

Collison Bros. has always had a name for a craftsman's finish, no job was too small (or too large) and whether it was building houses in Norwich or replacing an odd pane of glass in Guestwick, Collison could always be contacted and relied upon to carry out the work. The size of the business had been wound down over the past few years and although the history of the business commands a separate article, many people will remember a family business which in its last years grew in its reliability with the unique services of John and Tom Williams, "Busty" Rudd and Cyril Barber. Reepham will always have builders and Collison's will always be remembered with the best of them.

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