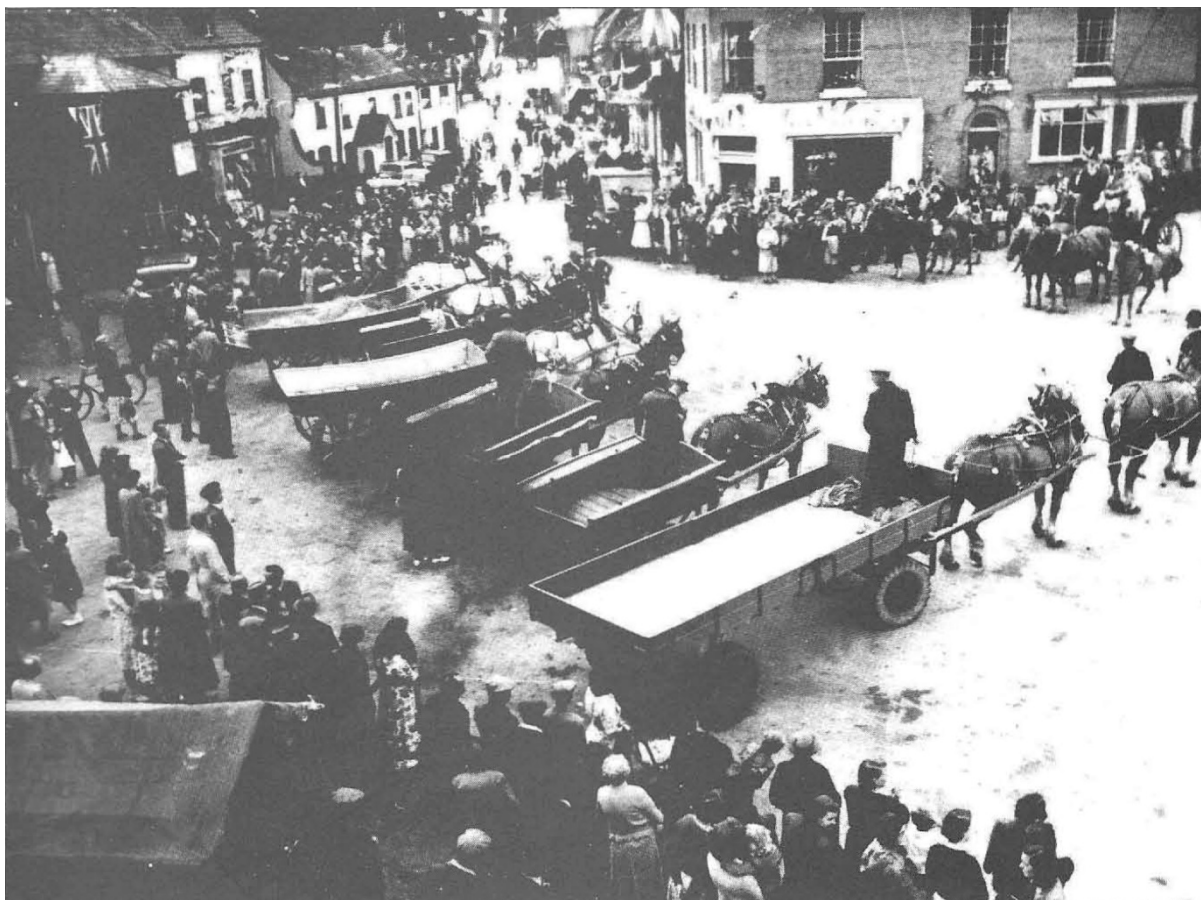


Reepham Shopping Week



Reepham Shopping Week was held in June 1950. It was originally planned as the Reepham Shopping Days and these were scheduled for June 14th, 15th and 16th, but the overall event was predetermined a success and events took place throughout the whole week. It was planned by members of the newly formed Reepham and District Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Shopping Week Committee was chaired by Mr S. Curtis. The purpose of the week was not for the individual gain of a few tradespeople but was intended for the benefit of the town of Reepham as a whole. It was hoped at the time that this would be the first of many such occasions which would advertise Reepham as a shopping centre and by degrees to increase the overall prosperity of the town.

Further Shopping Weeks with varied success were held in the following years. The success of the first one in 1950 assisted the parish council the following year in deciding that they would not support the festivities for the Festival of Britain but would offer their support instead to the Reepham Shopping Week.

The prospect of the new decade of the 1950s meant so much to the people at that time; the previous decade had contained the dark years of war and the period of post-war austerity. This had now passed (even though some rationing was to continue until 1954) and the transition from war to peace by the Labour government elected with a landslide victory in 1945 had in a few years achieved conspicuous success and the hopes of the people were that this trend would continue. Memories were still very clear in recollecting the harshness

and deprivation of the war and the post-war discomfort when in 1947 the heavy snowfalls and extreme cold gripped the country for several weeks, giving the worst winter in living memory. For so many years the basic foods and other household items had been unobtainable or rationed, simple pleasures became luxuries and routine travel had been tedious and time consuming.

These times of deprivation and inconvenience, which would be forever associated with the 1940s had however passed and 1950 was seen as a cornerstone. A decade viewed with hope and optimism and people were convinced that the worst was over and social conditions and life generally could only get better.

In 1950 Reepham was very much a local centre for the surrounding area. Agriculture was probably the largest overall employer and farm life was still greatly dictated by the walking pace of the carthorse. Reepham was a focal point for the rural population who lived within a walking or cycling distance and a large number of people regularly made their way into the town for most if not all of their shopping needs. A trip to Norwich was an irregular or perhaps even an annual visit and this for most people could only be made by train and not by car; transport for most people was by bicycle or else they had to walk. Larger orders placed with the local shops would be delivered by the shopkeeper's van or by a delivery boy on his tradebike. Bacon rashers were freshly sliced by hand for each customer, sugar was scooped out of a drawer by means of a handled measure and was weighed into thick, dark blue paper bags and thick rinded cheese was sliced by hand.

Shopping was a necessity that for many women formed a regular part of their daily routine; meat safes were essential and refrigerators were a luxury. Stabilisers and preservatives in food were yet to be introduced and if you wanted to keep food for any length of time it had to be bottled, pickled or preserved at home. The vegetable patch formed an indispensable part of every household and chickens and rabbits were kept for their ultimate value as a pie filling.

Much of the area had not been connected to the electricity supply and nor was mains water fully available. The flush toilet was still considered a luxury and for many the alternative was a little hut at the bottom of the garden, serviced on a weekly basis by the horse-drawn "night cart". Everybody knew exactly who everyone was, mechanised farming and household conveniences were unheard of, the abundance of vehicles on the roads had yet to appear and J. Sainsbury was a town grocer indistinguishable from thousands of others.

The turn of the year in 1950 signified hope and everyone was determined that this summer event would bring pleasure and profit and would be repeated in future years. The first part of this hope indeed came true, as the local press reported after the week was over "it was a thoroughly sound job that has been well done". Whether or not it brought in the continued material success that the local traders hoped for was uncertain at the time but the fact remained that the occasion brought a large number of people into the town to enjoy the events and Reepham was placed well and truly on the map.

The programme of events started on the Tuesday with the Grand Eve of Opening Dance which was held in the Reepham Band Hall when Gerald Amies and his orchestra played from

8 pm to 1 am. During the interval, the result of the ballot for "Miss Reepham" was announced. It had been agreed that Miss Reepham could be any lady above the age of 18 from within a radius of five miles and Miss Daphne Barrow was elected by the vote of the audience.

The following day saw the highlight of the "week", the grand parade on the Wednesday afternoon of Light, Heavy, Riding and Saddle Horses and Vehicles, which came from many local farms and trades and a gathering at the same time of the North Norfolk Harriers. This parade congregated in the Market Place and despite some adverse weather a large number of people watched as the turnout was judged and the various rosettes and other prizes were distributed. It was previously announced that two "mystery persons" (a lady and a gentleman) would tour the main streets between 2 and 3 pm and if they were successfully challenged by someone who was also able to produce a Shopping Week programme, they could claim a prize of 10/-. Miss Peggy Miller was the only person to successfully challenge and she secured the prize.

In the evening, the massed bands of Fakenham Town, Cawston and Reepham played in the Market Place from 7.30 – 9 pm and this was followed by an open-air dance with the music being provided by Mr Bird's radiogram. From the early morning bustle of the weekly livestock market to the enjoyment of the late evening dancing the whole town participated in a level of enjoyment that had not been experienced for many years. On the following day, a mammoth whist drive with 35 tables was held at the Band Hall. Mr H. Gibbons acted as master of ceremonies; there was a first prize of three guineas and the event was greatly appreciated by the many people who attended and particularly by those who went home with a prize.

Friday evening was an exceptionally busy time with many people coming into the town for the knock-out bowls competition and a darts contest. The bowls was organised by Mr C. Plume and played on the Sun Inn and Kings Arm's bowling greens with the winners Messrs. A. Carman, H. Bell and H. F. Laskey winning by nine shots to three. The darts competition was organised by Mr G. Bunn and this attracted more than 300 entries. The finals were played at the George and Dragon with winners coming from Cawston, Lenwade, Plumstead as well as Reepham. Miss Reepham with her attendants, Miss Joy Jones and Miss Jean Tubby, presented the prizes.

The "Week" was an unqualified success, it brought many people into the town and while this may not have raised a sustained level of trade for the local shopkeepers it certainly achieved its objectives in the short term. An opportunity was derived which allowed the local tradespeople to fully display their merchandise and their efforts were initially rewarded. The committee responsible for the organisation were rewarded too with the knowledge that a good job had been thoroughly well done and the foundation was laid for a similar successful event to be held the following year.



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