

Recalling the thrilling days of the old manual fire engine

The happy band of volunteer firefighters shown in the December photograph of the Reepham Life 2018 Calendar dates from May 1936 when the disused Primitive Methodist Church on Dereham Road had been purchased for the Fire Brigade by Edward Gibbs.



Reepham Fire Station on Dereham Road, possibly late 1930s.

Newspaper reports said the building had a “splendid frontage which affords a clean take-off from any angle. Mr Edwards Gibbs, sen., has had alterations made so that the brigade can stand both their engines and all their equipment in one place.”

Previously the old hand-engine had been stored on land in the area of Old Brewery Lane. Reepham’s fire brigade had been established for about 100 years, beginning with manual pumps carried on a horse-driven van.

Putting out a fire required a source of water and one report of a fire in December 1938 tells of the pump being placed at Sun Barn Pit (a large pond that existed in front of the present fire station) with more than 2,000 feet of hose run out through Church Street to the back of the Old Rectory. Inches of ice had to be broken before pumping could begin and several lengths of hose burst, the escaping water turning into sheets of ice within minutes.

In 1938, at the fire brigade’s annual dinner held at the Sun Inn, Edward Gibbs “recalled the days of the old manual engine. Those were the days of plenty of thrills, first in clashing the church bells, then the process of loading the engine onto a waggon, and then, upon arrival at the fire to have a look around, send someone straight away for bread and cheese and beer.”



Whitwell Road showing Sun Barn Pit.

*Janet Archer*