

# THE REEPHAM SOCIETY



SPRING 1989 NEWSLETTER

REEPHAM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER - SPRING 1989

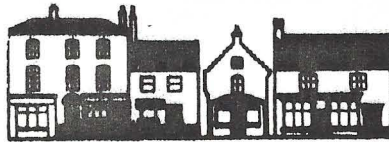
The front cover of this newsletter features the premises in the 1950s of E. Gibbs and Son, for many years one of the leading businesses in Reepham. Inside I have compiled an article about a firm which is still remembered with great fondness today by many Reepham people. I am indebted for the help given by Miss Marjorie Gibbs who was able to offer me clear recollections of the firm and its work and she has also kindly allowed me to reproduce a number of her personal photos and mementos of the business.

I have edited the Society's newsletter for the past 3 years and during this time I have been able to offer a number of articles about Reepham, articles which have been the work of independent contributors or have been the basis of work available to the reader from the local library etc. In the past 3 years much has been used and the source is beginning to dry up; usually at the start of each newsletter a number of items are available and these form the basis of the next edition. This newsletter has not been so easy, one or two promised contributions failed to materialise and I have had to resort to research to produce something which I hope will be of interest to you, the reader. On this basis it is likely that future newsletters will feature less but larger articles about Reepham rather than a number of smaller items as have been produced in the past 3 years.

I am always grateful for contributions and if you have anything that you feel is of interest then please get in touch with me; the contribution could be a fully researched and written article or can be a collection of photographs and memories which need to be drawn together and written up as happened with the article about E. Gibbs and Son.

Michael Black  
Tel: 870936

Middlemarch  
Broomhill Lane  
Reepham



## 1988/89 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Following the resignation of the Vice-Chairman, Mr M C Black, for business reasons, the Executive Committee has appointed Mr T J Large to fill the vacancy; and has also co-opted four members to the Committee. From September 1988 the following are the Officers and Committee.

### OFFICERS

CHAIRMAN	A H IVINS
VICE-CHAIRMAN	T J LARGE
TREASURER	J E AMES
SECRETARY	MRS M A HEMMINGS

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mrs I AMES  
R V GALLEY  
Mrs S IVINS  
Rev W E B JONES  
Mrs P LARGE  
\* Mrs E A PILCHER-CLAYTON  
\* J K PILCHER-CLAYTON  
\* D A PLANT  
Mrs H POTTLE  
\* J C STAPLES  
R F VINCENT  
Mrs J L WARING

\* Co-opted September 1988

Reepham Society Cheese & Wine Evening, October 1988

The Society held their thirteenth Cheese & Wine evening, once again at Whitwell Hall. More than one hundred members and friends attended for an evening of business, entertainment, and refreshments and certainly not least for a good mardle with friends. The business was the presentation of our Garden Competition awards. Mrs Rosemary Stimpson presented the Stimpson & Ewing Cups to the winners of the large and small gardens sections of the competition in the unavoidable absences of Mr John Stimpson and Mr Ken Ewing. Mr Loose had once again brought his considerable expertise to judge the competition and gave the company a talk about the merits of the gardens he had judged. The Society offers warm thanks to Mr Loose and to Mr & Mrs Bibby who organised the competition.

The entertainment was given by the Reepham Singers who seem to go from strength to strength, accompanied by the Rev. Gordon Dodson their performance for us was voted "just the kind of lively and musically delightful singing we enjoy". The entertainment ended with a short sketch illustrating modern educational methods to encourage learning.

The refreshment was admirably done, the tables filled with a tempting display of delicious things to eat and the wine served cheerfully and efficiently by friends who have developed their own expertise. The Society offers warmest thanks to those many friends who helped both before the during the evening. A tombola, instead of the usual raffle, seems to have been popular and raised a good sum towards the Society's funds. Many thanks to its "minder" who spent the evening dispensing tickets.

The annual Cheese & Wine is the main fund raiser the Reepham Society organises. Members subscriptions cover the production of the News Letter and the secretarial and other running expenses. So if we want to do something for Reepham that requires finance then it has to be raised in this way. This year the result was £300 for the Society's funds, not the most we have raised at a Cheese & Wine, but a very satisfactory conclusion to what many people have told us was a most enjoyable evening.

A. Ivins  
Chairman

THE REEPHAM SOCIETY

WINE AND CHEESE PARTY, 28 OCTOBER, 1988

RECEIPTS		EXPENDITURE	
Advance ticket sales	261 00	Piano tuning	15 00
Ticket sales at door	39 00	Catering	27 32
Bar	66 85	Light and heat	15 00
Tombola	97 00	Hire of Chairs	5 00
Coffee	11 00	Wine (£126 95 less refund £10 05)	116 90
		Excess receipts over expenditure	295 63
	<hr/> £474 85 <hr/>		<hr/> £474 85 <hr/>

## THE REEPHAM SOCIETY AWARD SCHEME

The scheme is a bi-annual award and nominations are now sought for the 1989 Award. Members will recall that the Award was made in 1983 to Birchams Yard, in 1985 to the Merchant Yard development and in 1987 was made to the Kings Arms for its extensive restoration work, for the way in which it had been sensitively painted and for the vibrance of colour offered by the summer display of flowering tubs and baskets.

Any member or non-member can submit schemes, and the full details covering the Scheme are outlined below.

I would ask that any nominations you may care to make are sent to

Mr Michael Black  
Middlemarch  
Broomhill Lane  
Reepham

or

Mrs Margaret Hemmings  
Cheville  
Whitwell Road  
Reepham

Tel. 870936

Tel. 870759

by no later than 31st May, 1989. It is hoped the schemes nominated will be inspected during the summer and it is intended for the Award to be announced in November 1989.

If anyone feels they wish to make a nomination but do not want to complete the application form details then a telephone call to either of the above two numbers will suffice.

Members and non-members of the Society are invited to submit schemes. The following examples are not definitive but include the types of practical work to be encouraged:

- i) Restoration of old buildings and structures, both internally and externally and, where necessary, their adaptation to a new use.
- ii) Replacement of obtrusive, excessively large or garish shop and other signs by signs better suited to the character of the surroundings.
- iii) Improvement of the surroundings of buildings and areas by landscaping, appropriate lighting and street furniture, and other means to create a more pleasing setting.
- iv) New construction, the design of which harmonises with the character of the surroundings.
- v) Repair, cleaning and repainting of buildings.
- vi) Open spaces introducing more trees, grass and flowers.
- vii) Repair and preservation of vernacular details.

APPLICATION FORM

To: Hon Secretary, The Reepham Society.

I wish the scheme mentioned below to be considered for a Reepham Society Award. I have obtained permission from the owner, and occupier where appropriate, for this scheme to be entered.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Dated \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete accurately the following:

1. Name of Scheme and Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Completion \_\_\_\_\_ (Schemes must be complete)

2. Name, Address & Telephone No of Owner \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name, Address & Telephone No of Occupier \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Name and Address of Designer/Consultants \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Name and Address of Builder or Manufacturer \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Names and Addresses of any Organisation involved (state capacity)

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Brief Description of the Scheme

NOTE: Any creative work which contributes to the quality and appearance of townscape or landscape is eligible. There will be no categorisation of entries. The following points should, however, be noted: (a) schemes must be such that they can be seen by the general public, (b) schemes must be fully completed (or if in several phases this must be defined) and (c) entries consisting principally of landscaping may need to be deferred for assessment if insufficiently mature to allow an impression of the intended effect. There is no limit to the number of entries allowed from any one source.

## The Ollands

Articles appeared in the last two newsletters about Ollands House, now the area of development known as Ollands Park. Miss Marjorie Gibbs has clear memories of the days when the Ollands was lived in by E.P. Oppenheim and she recently wrote to me with the following reminiscences.

"Mr Piercy's article about the Ollands in the last newsletter of the Reepham Society brought back memories to me of when E. Phillips Oppenheim resided there. I well remember the firework display; we supplied some of the fireworks but these were never grand enough and Mr Oppenheim would order a supply of large fireworks and set pieces which were sent direct by one of the manufacturers.

I met him on two occasions. The first time, he came into the shop (this shop was the firm of Edward Gibbs and Son, Ironmongers and Seed Merchants which closed in 1967 - Editor), he was wearing flannel trousers, a blazer and a straw boater and walked about smoking a cigar. He was quite a personality and looked most elegant.

He was a writer of mystery and detective novels and in those days he was widely read, he was probably as popular then as Agatha Christie is today.

There was a flourishing choral society in Reepham in the early 1920s and the twenty or so members would go carol singing at Christmastime. The first night we visited the large houses in the district having first acquainted them that we would be calling. On the second night we concentrated on various houses in Reepham finishing up at the Ollands. I well remember one Christmas, I think it was 1923, we were ushered into the large entrance hall by the butler, Mr London. We were greeted by Mr and Mrs Ryder Smith who asked us to sing to them, we were then regaled with hot sausage rolls and mince pies together with liquid refreshments. I can well remember Mr Ryder Smith offering me a choice of whisky, port, sherry or coffee, I very modestly chose the latter only to be admonished afterwards by my friends for not taking anything stronger whilst I had the chance.

At about 9.30 pm Mr and Mrs Oppenheim (the parents of Mrs Ryder Smith) came out from dinner (both in evening dress and he with the inevitable cigar) and they chatted with each of us; this was the second time I met Mr Oppenheim.

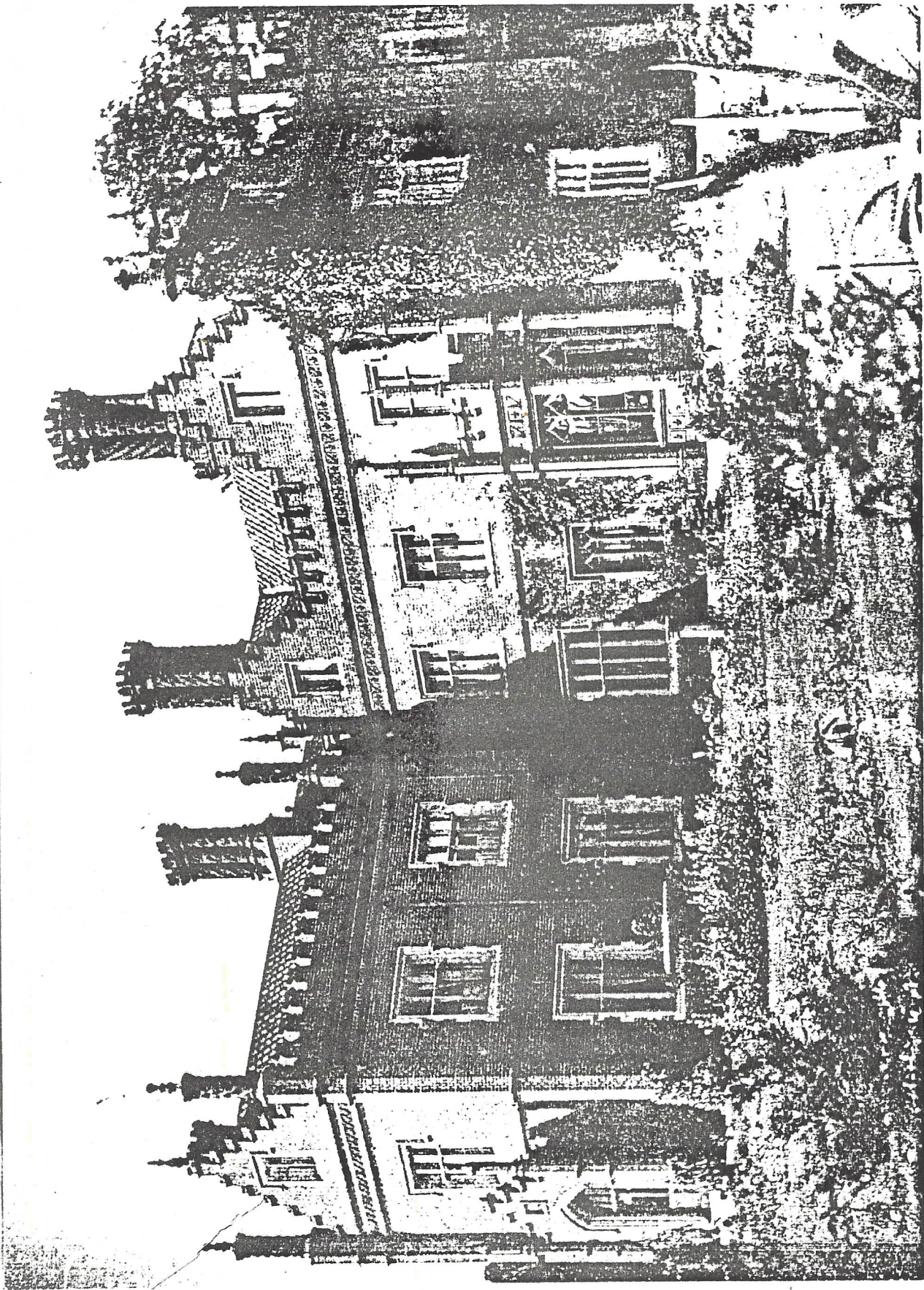
After leaving the Ollands the evening was concluded by the society singing 'O come all ye faithful' in the Market Place. We had all enjoyed the evening, not only for being so royally received but for the sheer joy of singing in harmony those lovely well-known carols.

Through business contact I knew Mr Oppenheim's secretary and she said that if an idea came to him during the night she would be called at any hour and would have to take dictation of the ideas and thought that came to him.

I must agree with Mr Piercy that Sir Henry Rider Haggard did not reside at the Ollands at any time, confusion about this possibility has probably arisen because Miss Oppenheim married Mr Ryder Smith and they lived at the Ollands for some time during Mr Oppenheim's residence there.

Marjorie Gibbs"





THE OLLANDS FROM THE SOUTH EAST

## Edward Gibbs and Son

Edward Gibbs and Son, ironmongers and seed merchants, became an institution in Reepham and their shop and general agricultural services to the farming fraternity in and around Reepham is still remembered with fondness today by many people in Reepham, even though their shop closed well over twenty years ago. It was said that the Gibbs business was famous for two things; firstly, its picturesque premises and the excellent services it gave and secondly, the late Mr. Edward Gibbs, who attended the business daily until he was ninety-eight.

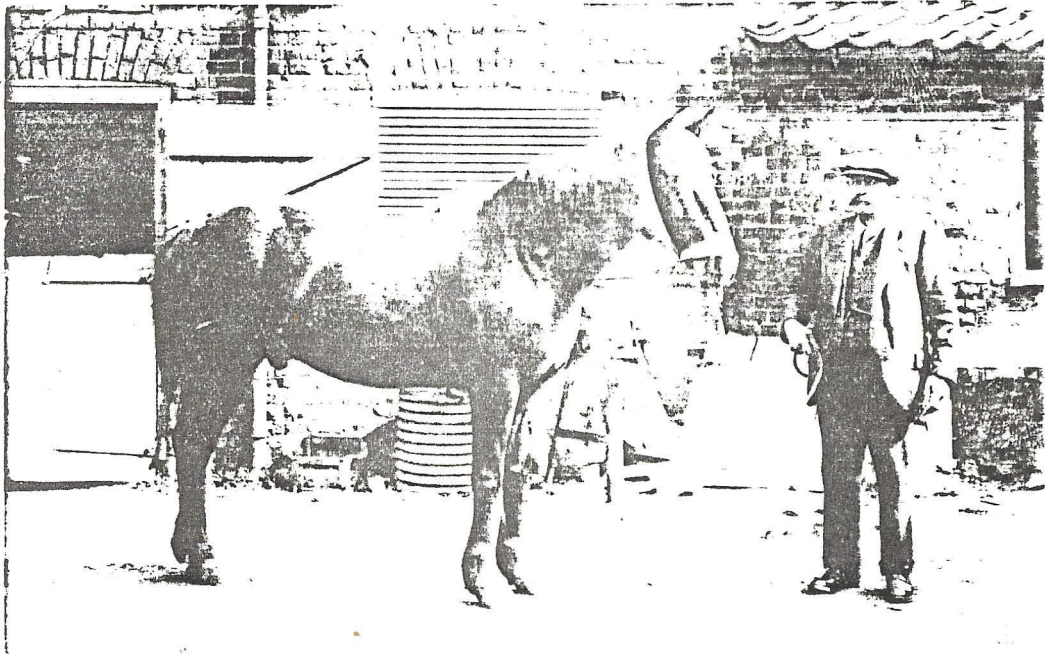
The premises, at the height of the business, were situated in the area which has now been converted into the commercial and residential area occupied by Merchants Yard, Ewings estate agents, Saralle Systems, M-Tec and a number of others. It was and probably will be the occupier of the largest commercial site in the centre of Reepham, with perhaps the exception of the Old Brewery House Hotel.

It is said that there were ironmongers on this site long before the business was bought by Gibbs, but the exact date of the foundation of this business is not known but in the churchyard is a tombstone inscribed "William Samuel George, ironmonger of this parish who died at the age of 69 years in 1802". The George family ran the business until it was purchased in the early 1870s by a firm called S. and S.W. Leeds who ran it until 1888 when Mr. Edward Gibbs took it over.

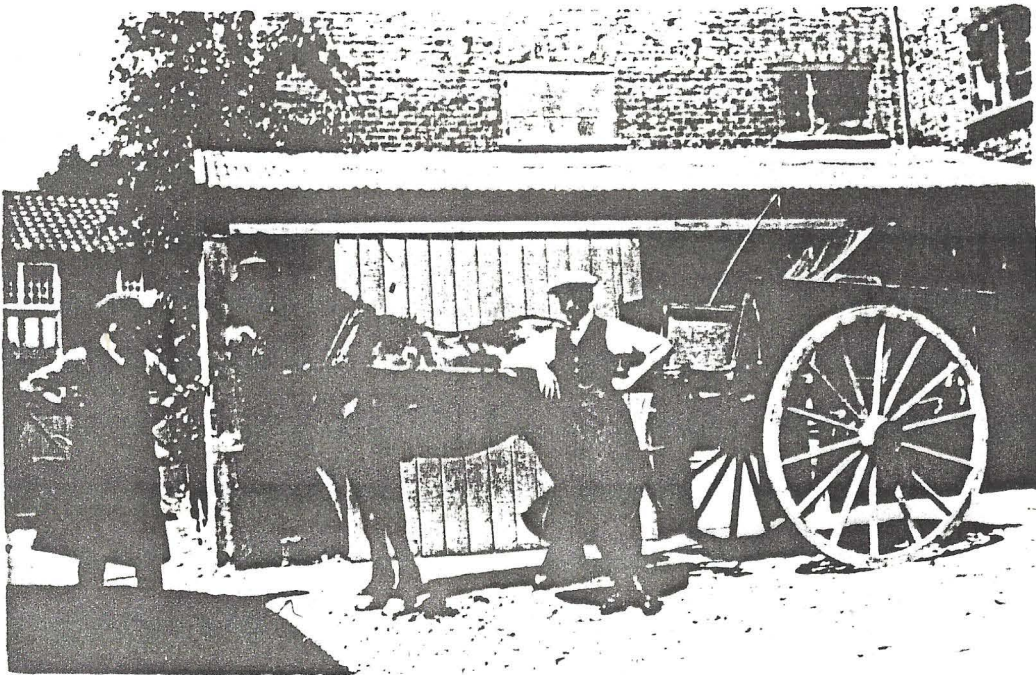
Edward Gibbs was born in 1860 the son of a farmer; he always wanted to be a farmer but during the 1870s farming was in a bad way so he applied for an apprenticeship with James Cooper and Son, ironmongers of East Dereham. He was accepted at a premium of £30 and served his five years starting at 2s 6d a week. He stayed with them until 1887 and when he left his weekly wages had raised to 30s. He took over the business of S. and S.W. Leeds on October 11th 1888 a week after he was married at St. Mary's Church, Hickling. His two children subsequently became partners, his son Edward in 1920 and in about 1957 his daughter Marjorie took an active partnership.

Edward Gibbs Senior took an active part in the business until he was ninety-four, and he then maintained a daily interest almost until his death in December 1959 at the age of ninety-nine. Edward Gibbs Junior started to work for his father immediately after leaving school, and only service in the first world war intervened. A motor cycle accident in 1915 robbed him of his sight but he still carried on working in the shop. At the age of seventy-four (in 1966) Edward Gibbs Junior decided to retire together with his sister, Marjorie, although both regarded the closing of the business as "a matter of real regret". Mr. Gibbs, after 60 years in the business, decided to retire for two reasons - firstly, because he wanted to and, secondly because of trade. The days of horses in farm work had long since departed; he stocked the equipment they needed but there was no longer a demand for it.

It was decided in 1966 to try and sell the business as a going concern but unfortunately the firm was unable to find a buyer. In early 1967 the stock was discounted by 5% and this discounting continued for the next three months reaching 20% before an auction was held in April 1967 in Irelands saleroom in Reepham (now the site of the car park in Station Road) when the remaining items were sold off.



'Monarch' with Edward Gibbs Snr - the horse was stabled at the rear of the premises, the area now known as Merchants Yard. During the First World War the Honourable Artillery Company was based in Reepham and Monarch had to share his stable with two of their horses.



'Monarch' with the firm's delivery cart ready for the day's business.

Part of the premises was bought by Mr. W. Ewing (now the estate agents) and the main part was bought by Mr. Ernest Clark who ran a hardware business until he retired due to ill health in 1982.

After Cyril Jolly's article appeared in the Eastern Daily Press, Mr. Gibbs received a letter from a reader in Gislingham, Suffolk who had read about the closure but he wondered if it was possible for him to obtain "a pound of so of the "rotten stone" powder which so intrigued Mr. Jolly". It seems that this powder mixed with certain acids and oils offered the best means of restoring the lustre to ancient copper. The reader had tried with a number of ironmongers and chemists to find some, but to no avail.

Miss Gibbs was able to supply the reader with some of the 'rotten stone' and he was able to clean some pieces of antique copper which until then had resisted all the orthodox methods of cleaning.

19

**REEPHAM,**  
NORFOLK. NOR 71X

*M*

BOUGHT OF  
**EDWARD GIBBS & SON**  
FURNISHING & GENERAL IRONMONGERS,  
SEED MERCHANTS,  
OIL & COLOR MERCHANTS.

TELEPHONE: 204  
REEPHAM

Partners: E. GIBBS, M. GIBBS (Miss)

This copy of Edward Gibbs and Son invoice heading cannot be appreciated as a black and white copy. It is a wonderful mixture of red, blue and green and few letter or invoice headings today meet this artistic standard.

D. BRAND & CO.

PREHAM ROAD STUDIO  
NORWICH



This photo was taken in the 1890s a few years after the business was purchased by Edward Gibbs.



Mr Gibbs and Mr Piercey mixing seeds in one of the upper storey sheds.

The following article appeared in the Eastern Daily Press in April 1967, shortly after the business closed. It was written by Cyril Jolly.

### Shop that mirrored 200 years of change

A Norfolk ironmonger's shop now closed after 200 years of trading, revealed on its shelves two centuries of social history and change.

There are more interesting ways of studying social history than in books. The closing of an ironmonger's shop, after two hundred years of trading, has shown me in a fascinating way how the tides of change have ebbed and flowed over rural life. Changes in lighting, cooking, travel, farming, sport and craftsmanship - revealed by goods on the shelves of a picturesque 18th century premises making a corner of Reepham's market square.

The square has its own charm, with thatched and Georgian houses, Flemish and crow-step gables, and two parish churches enclosed by the winding wall of one churchyard.

The ironmongery is itself a little kingdom, with two double-fronted shops, attics, cellars and a neighbourly medley of store-rooms and granary. Beneath four panes of "bulls-eye" glass I entered the main shop, which resembled Hampton Court maze with its passages and stairs.

One stairway beneath the main counter led to a cellar. I bent double under the counter to enter this Ali Baba's cavern. Instead of oil jars I found two large tanks, one for linseed oil and the other for lard oil. The spillings of generations mixed with sawdust caked the floor, and wall racks held paint, turpentine, black harness oil, and preparations only old tradesmen would recognise. A dozen smells also competed for recognition; linseed oil won easily.

In an attic, beneath adze-trimmed beams, were scores of parcels that had slept snug on their dusty shelves for a century. They contained nails (mostly hand-made); nails for carpenters, builders, wagon wheel tyres and strakes; nails for shoeing horses and the bullocks that once worked ploughs; frost nails and caulking nails. Here I tried out a machine that might have eased the drudgery of knife cleaning fifty years ago. "Tortoise" stoves elbowed door furniture into a corner, some would have graced a mansion and some a coal shed. A tub of gum arabic (used for starching shirt fronts in Edwardian times), scythe blades and plough blades, put back the clock half a century.

Climbing up cobwebby stairs to the seed warehouse, I skirted bins labelled clover, rape, trefoil and saw a set of seed riddles and a set of measures made in Dereham by Bradley and Utting and a flailing stool. The operator sat on one end, laid the corn on the other and beat it with a swipe of a hand flail.

In the yard was a gunpowder magazine for cartridges were made here. A hundred cases were set up in a frame, filled with powder, shot and wadding and the ends rolled in with a treadle machine - now only fit for the scrap heap.



This shows the premises in the late 1930s, the business premises had been enlarged in 1906 and now occupied the whole of the frontage which is contained today between Towns End Corner and Barclays Bank. Apparently the array of hardwood and rooming gear was brought out every morning and taken in again at the end of day.



The premises in the 1950s - wares are not displayed in such volume outside the shop but the virginia creeper has nearly covered the whole frontage.

The proprietors, Mr E Gibbs and his sister, showed me the main shed with its countless drawers each bearing a sample of the contents nailed to the front. What a cavalcade of village life they represented. There were brass plug-taps for wine barrels of halls or public houses, (some had a locking device - and probably needed it). Cattle clippers, pig and bull rings, "humbugs" for putting in the nostrils of cows when giving a medicinal drink, cheese wire; a key for fitting skates and ancient brass gear for shutters and blinds.

Some peculiar needles puzzled me - they were larding needles used to pierce meat on a spit and draw off the grease into a larding tray. I handled lamp glasses of all shapes and curious tools for many crafts made in an age when wearing value mattered more than a glossy finish.

In the office was a "wheelers' round", used by wheelwrights to measure iron for re-tyring cart wheels, and well-thumbed price books going back to Victoria's golden reign, listing nails at 10s.6d. a cwt., a bass broom at two pence, and copper sheet at fifteen pence a pound.

My brow furrowed as I picked up a swan-necked object - a stand for goffering irons! There was an ancient machine with a turntable for sharpening horse-clipper blades; unopened boxes of candle snuffers; a whip socket and undressed leather for pump clacks.

Miss Gibbs recalled, as a girl, selling "penn'orths" of red ochre for smartening doorsteps, and "penn'orths" of black gunpowder for cleaning out oven and copper flues. Had I known, in my boyhood, what fun I would have had with mother's wall oven!

As a lad, Mr Gibbs got a frisky pony from the meadow and took down sixteen shutters for the shop to open at 7 a.m. It closed at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Saturdays. Thursday was half-day - it closed at 4 p.m.! He also remembered a tub containing macassa oil which his father boiled with beeswax and oil of lavender to make a hair pomade. We looked in vain for some needles used to make up straw and oat flight mattresses.

Turning out more drawers we conjectured on the use of "Rotten Stone" powder, and green copperas (was it used to prevent lime rubbing off walls?). There were dozens of other objects, once in common use, now museum pieces. They were facets of bygone rural life; peepholes on to a half-forgotten yesterday. In fact, beneath the many-angled roofs was two hundred years of social history, told in oil lamps, flat irons, tarred twine - and, I suppose, "Rotten Stone".



Reepham,

March, 1887.

Dear Sir,

We beg to inform you that we have carefully selected, and can now offer a variety of GENUINE ENGLISH (HOME GROWN) AND FOREIGN

## Agricultural Seeds,

which we highly recommend for cleanliness, rare quality and reasonable prices. We have also some good SEED OATS, grown in this parish.

MANGOLD, SWEDE and TURNIP SEED at lowest prices.

Your kind favours are respectfully solicited by, and shall receive the prompt attention of

Your obedient Servants,

S. & S. W. LEEDS,

CORN, POLLARD, MEAL, &c.

TILES, PAVEMENTS AND DRAIN PIPES.

AGENTS FOR AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY.

S. and S.W. Leeds ran the business until it was purchased by Edward Gibbs in 1888, this is a card presented to local farmers by this firm. Such representations today would be hard to find.

"GOODBYE TO GIBBS"

Now Gibbs's shop is closing,  
And Reepham must repine.  
For here it was we bought our nails,  
Our crockery, paint, and twine.

The shop-floor, bare and boarded,  
We reached by several steps.  
Above us, from the ceiling,  
Hung shears and pails and skeps.

The long old wooden counter,  
All worn and scratched with use,  
Bore stains of oil and plaster,  
And varnishes sold loose.

A hundred years or so ago  
It stood in garish pride,  
When all those shelves were hard and new,  
Ranged on its other side.

Now still the drawers and boxes  
Are marked in bold black "CAPS":  
COLD CHISELS, TURNSCREWS, PUNCHES,  
SHAVE HOOKS, ARCH DRILLS, BRASS TAPS

CHEESEWIRES, SMALL STAPLES, PLANE IRONS;  
LINE-PINS and APPLE CORERS;  
TACK HAMMERS, KNOBS, AND FARRIERS' KNIVES,  
TWIST-BITS, SWISS-BITS, and BORERS.

HOSE-FITTINGS, PULLEYS, WHEEL-VALVES;  
DOOR-PLATES, PAD-BOLTS, BIB-COCKS;  
BRASS CABIN HOOKS, FLY-CATCHERS,  
COLANDERS, CLASPS, RIM-LOCKS ...

And what, we wonder, were all these?  
And who the folk who sold them?  
Only the empty drawers remain  
For cobwebs to enfold them.

But we remember, clean and bright,  
The pleasant place we knew.  
And Reepham folk will not forget  
The shop in white and blue.

Maggie Pye

A small booklet about Reepham was printed in 1967, it included a poem by Maggie Pye which lamented the closure of Gibbs and Son.

# Litter squads for schools urged

CHILDREN in Norfolk should be made to pick up litter before being allowed to leave school at the end of day, a parents organisation chief urged yesterday.

Richard Bird, chairman of Norfolk Federation of Parent Teacher Associations, said pupils should have to clean school buildings and playing fields to help instil a sense of discipline.

But a Norwich head teacher claimed a similar system at her

school worked perfectly well on a voluntary basis.

Then comments followed a call from Schools' Minister John Butcher for schools to set up litter squads (on a Berkshire school which he described as a shining example of how youngsters could be taught self-discipline).

Mr Bird described litter squads as an excellent idea.

"In Norwich, the schoolchildren are litter-bugs and young children with parents just throw things away in the street," he said.

"What has got to happen is that it has got to start from the very early stages, and everybody in the school should be doing this.

But Bowthorpe High School head teacher Marion Chapman said there was already a similar system operating at her school without any compulsion.

"We have volunteers who do the cleaning during pastoral care time," she said.

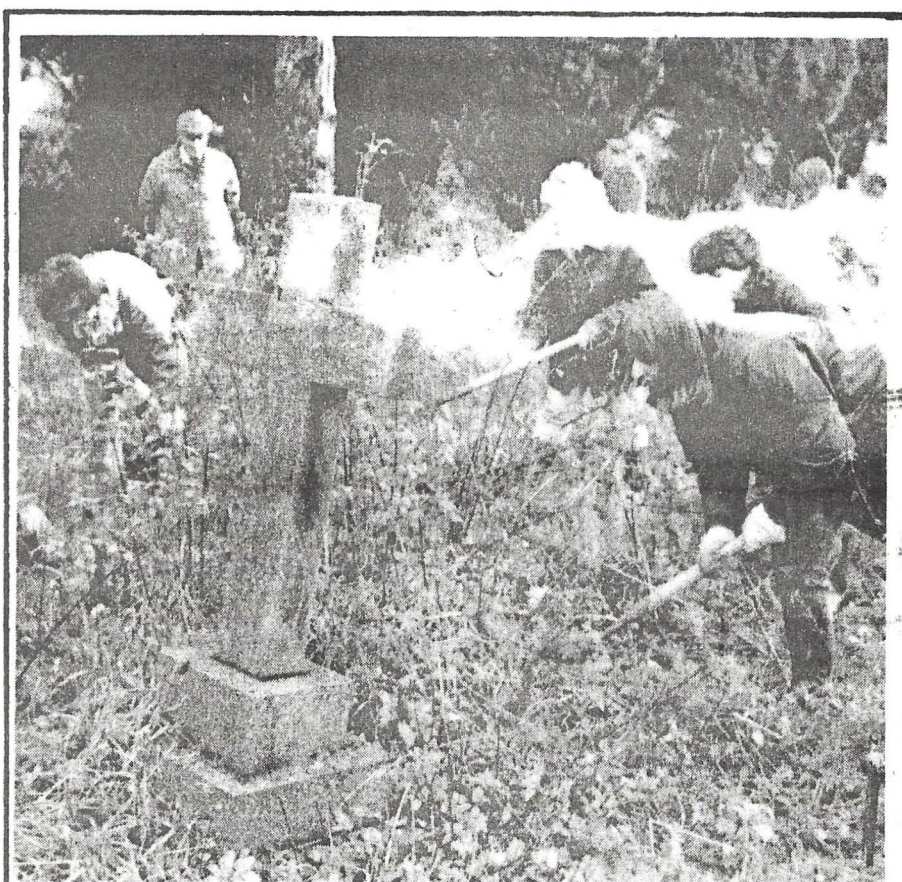
"I feel pupils should be fully involved and we had a very healthy response when we asked

for volunteers," she went on.

Mr Butcher said of Windsor Boys' School litter squads system: "I shall be drawing this school's success to the attention of local education authorities, with whom I shall be having discussion about making our school playgrounds and playing fields litter-free zones."

At the school, pupils only sign the register and leave at the end of the afternoon once the staff are satisfied the grounds and buildings are fit to be handed over to the caretakers.

After the attempts by the Society in 1988 to make Reepham a tidier place it is nice to know that one of the sources of the problem is not contained entirely in Reepham.



Some of the Reepham Young Farmers who helped clear the old cemetery.

## Having a slashing time

A BAND of Reepham Young Farmers slashed their way through undergrowth at a conservation area.

But the magnificent seven were working for a good cause. They had volunteered to do the work at the former Reepham and Kerdiston Burial Ground for the Reepham Society.

Chairman Mr Tony Ivins said the

area was cut annually at this time of year, to avoid disturbing wildlife.

The area is managed by the Society, which has an avenue of yew trees, a pair of Corsican pines, and mature wild flowering cherries, planted by the Women's Institute about 15 years ago.

Rowan trees and buddleia have also been planted to attract wildlife.

# Villagers need warning and save church

ST. AGNES' CHURCH, CAWSTON

MAJOR fund-raising drive by villagers has helped to save one of Norfolk's most precious churches from obscurity.

The rector of Cawston, Rev. Aylsham, had warned that the church could close because it needed £23,000 for repairs and attracted only tiny congregations.

Villagers responded by forming the Friends of St Agnes and, after less than a year, have helped raise about £10,000. The rest of the money had already been promised in grants.

The delighted rector, the Rev. Mike Stallard, said yesterday: "I told people that unless they took an interest and started raising the money, the church would close. They started fund-raising with terrific gusto and we managed to hit our target by Christmas."

He hoped the repairs, including work to the roof, gutters, and drainage improvements, would be carried out ready for a special thanksgiving service in October, when the church would be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the last recorded rector at Cawston.

Mr. Stallard expects that other repair work will be needed at the church, which he said had one of the finest angel roofs in the world.

He said the church, which now attracted more than 30 people at Sunday services, would not close if added: "We have got



\*The highly individual carved wooden angels which have adorned the roof of St Agnes' Church, Cawston, for 500 years.

Story: Ian Bullock. Pictures: Nick Lyons

to keep going at it. We can't just sit back and say 'That's it.'"

The Friends raised money through various events such as whist drives, coffee mornings, concerts, stalls and a fete. There was also a two-week exhibition of work by Norfolk artists in the church and a ball at Cawston College.

Greetings cards with artwork by Iris Francis were sold to help the cause, and a set of postcards was produced featuring reproductions of photographs taken in 1910 and given to the church by Avis Marsh, of West Runton.

Led by chairman John Farrow and secretary Valerie Burton, they managed to secure further grant aid, including £4000

from the Norfolk Churches Trust and about £2500 from English Heritage.

Mr Farrow said the fund-raisers had included long-established residents as well as newcomers to Cawston, and added: "It's such a lovely old building and we didn't want to lose the church in the village."

In previous newsletters articles have been included about some of the churches in the Societys "area of benefit" there were three articles about the churches at Booton, Reepham and Salle. All of these churches are of some individual and exceptional interest but there is also another church nearby which has some outstanding features, St. Agnes' at Cawston.

Cawston is a village which although only 3 miles away is not normally associated with the area of benefit of the Reepham Society, although the church can clearly be seen from various points within Reepham.

Like many of our churches it currently suffers from the urgent need for expensive repairs, the problems of Cawston church have been featured in the local press and also extensively in an article a few months ago in the Sunday Times Magazine. It is nice to note that the villagers of Cawston have responded to the problems and have raised a sizeable amount of the total required, as the recent article in the Eastern Daily Press shows.



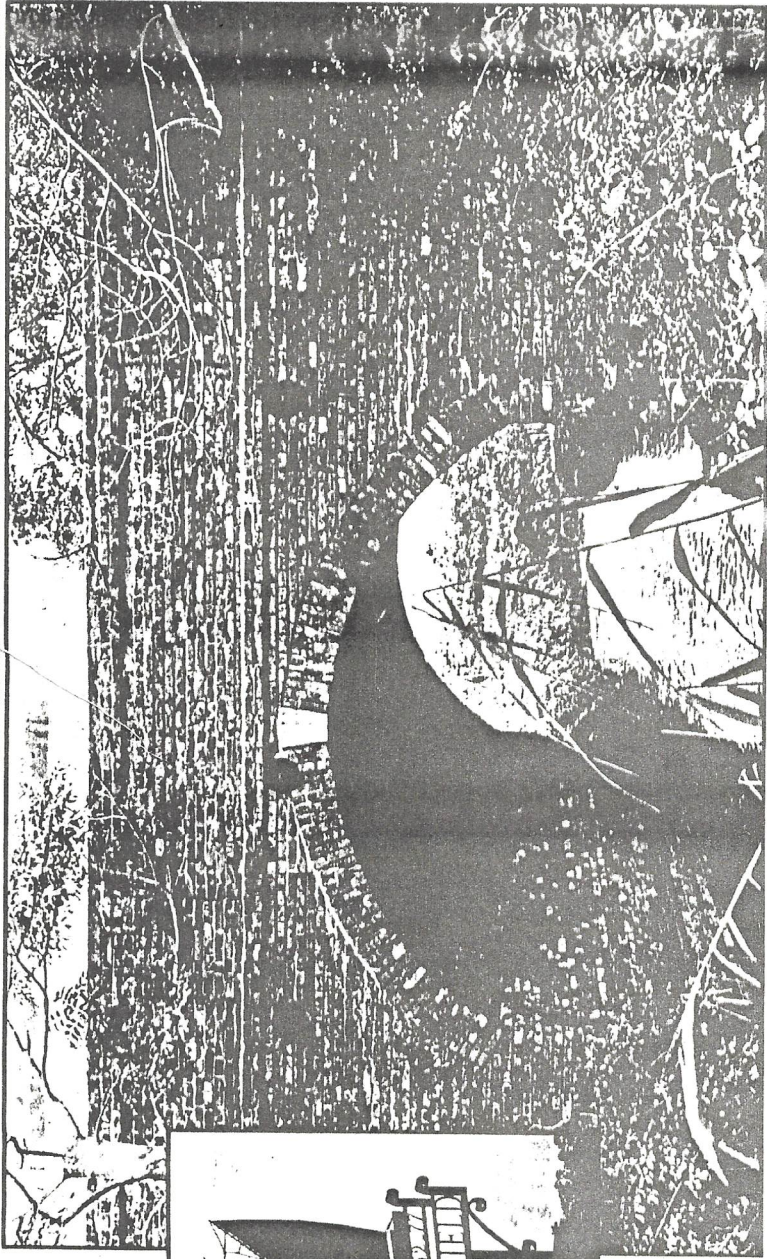
The chairman of the Friends of St Agnes' Church, Cawston, John Farrow, examines the decaying masonry of the south aisle.



John Farrow, left, and the rector of Cawston, the Rev. Mike Stallard, admire the treasures of one of Norfolk's finest medieval buildings.



Bacton Wood Mill, Spa Common, where present owner, nurseryman Alan Mason, believes a mill has stood since the time of the Domesday Book.



Many charming brick-arched bridges still exist where the road crosses the reed-encroached course of the North Walsham and Dilham canal. Inset: Swafield's village sign recalls a time when the wherries were once a familiar sight on the canal.

# Monument to a golden age

**T**ODAY the North Walsham to Dilham Canal stands still — its silted waters a monument to a Victorian enterprise which flourished on the harsh rocks of progress. Over the past 10 years fresh plans have been mooted to clear the way once more for a modern boom industry, rural tourism. But the fated canal has run into difficulties again.

The Inland Waterways Association, which is behind the latest initiative, needs a tireless volunteer with the drive and determination to lead the mammoth task of re-opening the waterway. Discussions have been held with North Norfolk District Council which is also keen to see it reopened for quiet recreation.

But Graham Eckersley, treasurer of the

DREDGING work on part of the old Dilham to North Walsham canal has revived memories of the days when North Walsham had a trading link with Yarmouth. DAVID BLYTH looks at the waterway's chequered history.

Norwich branch of the association, said the group was looking for a project leader to prepare a study on the feasibility of carrying out the restoration.

“Unfortunately, the chap that was chairman of the committee preparing the study has moved to Oxford,” he said. “This idea in the long term was to have the canal navigable again for rowing boats and small craft. I know the district council would like something done, if we could find a leader, anybody interested in forming a committee, then we would love to hear from them,” he said.

David Evans, the district council's deputy planning officer, said the canal project was last discussed in March this year. “The proposal is still on the cards but the ball is in the association's court. It is a good idea,” he added. The canal, which opened in 1826, was constructed to convey coal into North Walsham and grain back out.

It was the first to recognise the potential of the canal by converting wherries for holiday use.

But it was the increasing cost of carrying cargo and more economical forms of transport which heralded the death of the canal as a trading link.

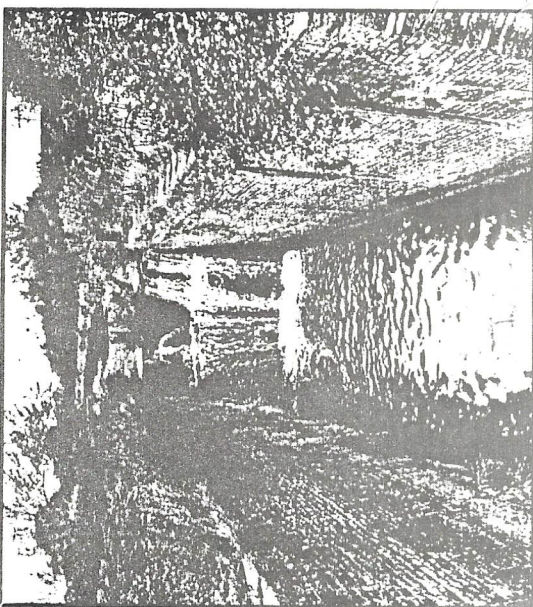
The last trading wherries reached Ebridge Mill in 1935 before the waterway declined to its present state.

Mr Evans said grants could be made available to groups attempting excavator “bur” to open up the towpath and the river would cost an absolute fortune, he said.

The waterways association cleared a section upriver from Wayford Bridge a few years ago and more recently a section in the Swafield area was dredged by Anglian Water.

The water authority information officer Angela Mackley explained that the river link between North Walsham and Dilham is classed as main river and the dredging had to be kept up to maintain the flow.

A stretch from Briggate Mill to Swafield was dredged so the river can take a flood, she said.



Water still cascades into the deep brick-lined lock at Ebridge Mill.

New members since the last newsletter

Miss R.A. Smith

Mr & Mrs R.D. Blake

Mr & Mrs B. Hardiment

Mr & Mrs D.H.K. McDowell (LIFE)

Mr & Mrs B. Atteridge

Mrs L. Annesley

Mrs T.E. Church

Mrs P. Oldham

Miss G. Wright

Mr Robert Reid

Mr & Mrs B. Dye

Mr & Mrs A. Barnes

Mr & Mrs P. Dickson

Mrs S. Anderson

Mrs P. Waterworth

Mr & Mrs N. Flynn

Mr & Mrs P. Hoveson

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