

## The Ollands

*Built 1832. Demolished 1972. From 1920 to about 1928 this was the home of Edward Philip Oppenheim (1856-1946 ) author of many novels, mainly about espionage and diplomacy, including 'The Great Impersonation' and 'Envoy Extraordinary'. – G. K. 26.6.87*

The Ollands Park estate now fills the area which was formerly the Ollands House and its grounds. Many people in Reepham remember with affection this large open area which was lost to residential development in the early 1970s and those in Reepham with long memories can remember the house in its heyday with its formal gardens, conservatory and mass of mature trees. Very little remains today, Echo Lodge in Ollands Road and a few mature trees are the only remaining items to remind us of a small-town grandeur which is now only a fond memory.

The Ollands was built in 1832 and was owned by William Bircham Esq. for 40 years or so until the 1880s. It was then owned by Mr and Mrs Kendrew who left in 1914. During the Great War, the house was used as an officers mess and after the war it was bought by Mr and Mrs Oppenheim. During the 1930s it was bought by Mr and Mrs Harmer (the Norwich clothing manufacturers) and then it was lived in by Mr and Mrs Irwin.

Some of the occupants are remembered today, the name of Bircham is somewhat synonymous with Reepham and the Irwins are remembered in Irwin Close which leads from Bircham Road to the new Moorhouse Estate. The occupant who was probably most famous in his time but is now generally forgotten is Edward Phillips Oppenheim. He was an author who wrote about 150 books, mainly travel, in addition to many newspaper and magazine articles in this country and the USA.

Robert Standish wrote a book about his life and entitled it 'The Prince of Storytellers', he makes a few references to Oppenheim's time in Reepham. It seems that he moved here in about 1920 and went, apparently to avoid paying some taxes, to the Riviera in 1925. In the autobiography, the house is referred to as Reepham House and from then on it was called this by those who lived there, although Reepham has always called it Ollands House or The Ollands.

There is a feeling that the house was lived in by the more famous novelist, H Rider Haggard, during the 1920s – there is no clear evidence to bear this out and it would seem that in many ways the two writers were comparable, and this has caused confusion. They were both writing novels at the same time and were famous during the 1920s, both lived in Norfolk (Rider Haggard at Ditchingham) and they both abbreviated their Christian name to the first letter.

It would seem likely that they knew each other and although it is possible that Rider Haggard visited Ollands House he never actually lived there.

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