

James, Hester & Mary : The Reepham Connection

In March 1976 Marjorie Gibbs wrote to the Eastern Daily Press, in response to previous items about James, Hester and Mary.

## MINSTREL MEMORY

Sir — I remember Mary, Jimmy and Esther (not Angie) very well indeed. They lived in an old cottage at Lyng when not wandering around the country.

As a child I can remember them coming to our back door and mother used to give them a meal. Because they were too smelly and dirty they did not come into the house but ate their meal in the stable, feeding themselves with fingers which were preferred to knives and forks. Esther had to be hand fed as she was blind and was never taken out of the old pram.

One day mother asked Mary (who was the most loquacious of the three) about her background, to which she replied: "Ah, le-ady — that's it! I used to go to Wells Church in a silk dress, but now, well, le-ady, that's just it." I remember hearing her say this, but mother, who tried to probe a bit more into the why and wherefore, got no further than: "That's just it!"

A relative of mine took a photo of the three and printed them on postcards with the inscription:

*Here's Mary and Jimmy and  
Esther you see,  
A typical picture of poverty;  
With very few clothes to cover  
their ribs,  
This photo was taken by F. J.  
Gibbs.*

I think they sold these cards for 2d. each. Unfortunately I cannot trace having one in my house now, but possibly some of your readers may still have one in their possession.

Another vagrant who used to turn up from time to time was a lone female known to everyone as "Old Pippaluny." She would sing hymns in her raucous voice — Sankey's mostly. The boys used to run after her and call out her nickname and she would be singing hymns with one breath and with the next screaming and calling these boys all the filthy names she knew. — Yours faithfully,

MARJORIE GIBBS.

The Laurels, Reepham.



Marjorie recalls them :-

*'coming to our back door and mother used to give them a meal. Because they were too smelly and dirty they did not come into the house but ate their meal in the stable, feeding themselves with fingers which were preferred to knives and forks. Esther had to be hand fed as she was blind and was never taken out of the pram.'*

Marjorie's uncle Frederic J Gibbs had a watchmaker's and tobacconist's shop at Towns End. He is named as a photographer age 29 in the 1911 Census when he was living with his uncle Edward Gibbs, the ironmonger, and probably took many of the old photographs of Reepham.



Marjorie says that Frederic took photographs of the three vagrants and printed them on postcards (which they sold for 2d.) with the following verse :

*Here's Jimmy and Mary and Esther you see,  
A typical picture of poverty;  
With just a few rags to cover their ribs,  
This photo was taken by F. J. Gibbs.*

*In April 1976 came another response with additional photographs from a Mr Wade of Foulsham.*

*Why they were referred to as 'Minstrels' is a mystery.*

## Views of those minstrels

FOLLOWING the publication of several letters in the "E.D.P." about Mary, Jim and Esther, the wandering minstrels, I have now received pictures of them from Mr. R. Wade, of 3, Bexfield Road, Foulsham.

Both are postcards and both, I think, were taken by F. J. Gibbs, for one of them also has printed on the top the verse mentioned in one of the earlier letters:

Jimmy, Mary and Esther you see,  
A typical trio of poverty;  
With just a few rags to cover their ribs,  
This photo was taken by F. J. Gibbs.

Neither picture, alas, is dated, but judging by their appearances the one of the bicycle seems to have been taken some time in advance of the other.

I also received a letter from Mrs. N. E. Shucksmith, of 41, Holt Road, Langham, who tells me her father, Jack Burton, now 83, also recalls the trio in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Burton also said the tramp called "Puddy" had the surname of Bullen. He evidently used to spend the winter at Thursford "workhouse" and would take to the road during the summer months.