

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 motorcycle 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.

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.

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