

## The Moor House

The house and the grounds that we know today as the Moor House were built in 1888 but there was a smaller house (with the same name) occupying the site before this date. It is difficult to detail when the original house was built, but it is known to be between 1846 and 1865, probably nearer the later date.



The tithe map of 1846 for this area shows only a general collection of farm buildings and other dwellings. In 1865, Kelly's Directory of Norfolk records a Mrs Dalrymple as a private resident living at Moor House; the directory records very few private residents and it can be assumed that those included were persons of some financial means and social standing, and this status would no doubt have been shown in the local community by the size of their residence.

In his reminiscences of Reepham, Harry Hawes recorded that "Mrs Dalrymple lived there, she was aunt to Mr Sam Bircham a very nice old lady, generous to the poor. She would ride about in a donkey chaise fitted with a glass front and whenever she went out, she was always accompanied by her nurse."

Mary Anne Dalrymple was born in 1778 and died in Reepham in 1875; In 1799 she was married to William Dalrymple and had ten children. It is reputed that William Dalrymple walked from Dumfries, Scotland, to Norwich to join some uncles in business there. He became a surgeon and gained a national reputation for his work at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital.

One of their daughters, Marianne, married William Bircham in 1823. William was a brewer who lived at The Ollands and he owned the various tithes that today make up the area of the Moor House, and it was he who is assumed to have built the original house.

William Bircham remained in residence at The Ollands and never lived in Moor House but it seems to have been the home of members of his family. Another daughter of William and Mary Dalrymple was Catherine who, in 1837, married Francis Thomas Bircham and their son was Samuel Bircham who eventually inherited the Moor House. After the death of Mary Ann Dalrymple in 1875 a Mr Frank Parmeter of Booton Hall came to live at the Moor House. The Kelly's Directory of 1883 lists a Miss Bircham and Francis Parmeter as residing there. There was another branch of the Bircham family which lived at Booton Hall and Francis Parmeter (from Aylsham) married one of the daughters of the Samuel Bircham who resided there in the late 18th and early 19th century (not to be confused with the other Samuel Bircham mentioned above).

By the late 1870s Frank Parmeter was widowed and he went to live at the Moor House with one of his wife's unmarried sisters.

In the late 1870s, William Bircham was forced to reconsider his financial position. With the encroachment of the railways, the Bircham Brewery monopoly in this area was put under fierce competition, particularly from the Norwich breweries, and the family were in turn placed under severe financial pressure. In 1879 the Old Brewery House and various other lots in Reepham were sold at auction by Messrs Spelman and Company.

The Old Brewery House was bought by Samuel Bircham, who although a member of the Reepham Bircham family, was a successful solicitor who lived in Surrey and practised in London.

It was ironic and perhaps satisfying to William Bircham that Samuel should purchase the Old Brewery House and he further extended Samuel's estate in Reepham when after William's death in 1886 he left in his will the area in, around and including the Moor House to Samuel who had to purchase his holding.

Due to his financial difficulties, William had mortgaged the Moor House and the surrounding area to Samuel Bignold in 1876. To inherit the property Samuel paid £2,250 to clear the mortgage.

As Samuel now owned all this area, he decided in 1888 to clear the whole site to make the house larger and generally to turn it into a house of some magnificence. All the dwellings, farm buildings and other buildings were demolished and the whole area turned into gardens and grounds to complement the new house. The Black Lion

public house was demolished and a new one was built on the opposite side of the road. A gardener's cottage was then built on the site of the old Black Lion. The only early building which survived behind the house was probably used as outhouses and stables to serve the original, smaller Moor House.

I have been unable to find out who carried out the extensive rebuilding of the Moor House but Harry Hawes wrote in 1949 that the Black Lion was built by John Hever and Son, builders of Norwich, and that his father Thomas Hawes was given the order to demolish and clear away all the cottages, farm houses and buildings which were on the site; he was also given the order to build about 50 yards of flint wall which encloses part of the grounds.

After the house was completed (at a cost of £19,000) Samuel Bircham lived there for part of the year although working in London. He also lived in Surrey where he built three further houses to live in. It is said that his wife did not like living in the Moor House and they spent their time in their various other homes. Samuel Bircham lived here until the turn of the century when it was rented to Ernest Hudson who was here from about 1903 until his death in August 1931. While living at the Moor House his son Sydney died, aged 27 in 1909 and his wife Helen and second son Eric both died in the influenza epidemic of April 1919; all four members of the family are buried in the Norwich Road cemetery, almost opposite the grounds of the house where they lived.

He was fond of horses and kept a number of fine animals in the stables which still back along New Road. When the First World War came the horses were all requisitioned and taken away by the Army. Like so many other animals none of his horses came back and it is said the grief of losing them caused him never to have any more.

Ernest Hudson is still remembered today by some residents of Reepham who recall him as a large and kind elderly man. He had a north country accent and he was reputed to be part of the family that owned Hudson's Soaps; whether or not this is true he was always referred to as "Soapy Hudson" in Reepham.

Local people who knew the house during this period remember the grounds and front gardens as always being meticulously kept. With similar attention by full-time gardeners being paid to the nearby grounds of The Ollands, this area of Reepham must, during the summer months, have been wonderful to walk round and look at.

After Ernest Hudson's death in 1931 the house remained empty until the Second World War. It was kept windproof and watertight during these years until it was used by the Army during the war years.

There were many serving members of the armed forces based in and around Reepham during this time and it seems that those based at the Moor House

constantly changed. Their general role was not believed to be of any great or secret importance.

In 1947 the Bircham family sold the Moor House to Dr Eglinton who used it as a nursing home until the late 1980s. During the later years, the house was used by numerous film and television companies to provide settings both inside and outside for various films and programmes. The most notable being the extensive use by Anglia Television in connection with the film adaptations of a number of P D James novels. The Moor House was sold again in 1989.

*From an article published in the Reepham Society Magazine 1993*