

### History of Hackford House in the 1900s

This year (2019) Reepham is celebrating the centenary of the presentation of Hackford House to the town by Samuel Bircham as a memorial to lives lost in the First World War.



Hackford House in about 1906

In the 1920s, the house sustained its original purpose of providing a reading room where newspapers and periodicals could be read, and a billiards room, with facilities for other games as well as the parish library. Rooms were also available for other organisations such as the whist club. From about 1927 the County Library had a room in what was then called the Bircham Institute that opened two or three times a week, manned by volunteers. Mr Thompson, the schoolmaster, was librarian.

At some point before 1919 part of the house had been used by Wallace King for the Reepham branch of its home furnishings company.

Samuel Bircham probably purchased Hackford House in 1910 from Fanny Spencer, the eldest daughter of John and Harriet Spencer. John Redman Spencer, previously a farmer with land in Guestwick, had died in 1909. A second daughter, Florence, had lived with her parents until her father died. After the house was sold, Florence lived with her sister Fanny in Norwich.

In the 1911 census, the occupants of Hackford House are recorded as Jemima Bruce (widow) and her daughter Margaret, who occupied eight rooms in part of the building. At least one other room was used as a club room by the newly formed Hackford House Troop of Scouts.

The Bruce family had lived on the Isle of Man, but in 1900 Alexander Bruce, manager of Dumbell's Bank and head of many important Manx enterprises, was involved in the failure of the bank. He had been ill for some time and died before he could face prosecution.

His wife Jemima and three daughters left the Isle of Man and in 1901 the two older daughters,

Margaret and Agnes, were living in the Old Brewery House. Agnes would later (in 1903) marry Francis R. S. Bircham, Samuel Bircham's only son.

Jemima Bruce remained in Reepham for some time, living in part of Hackford House with her eldest daughter Margaret and later moving to Norwich.

*Janet Archer*