

Fined for selling 'water glass eggs'

Before the days of refrigeration all kinds of foods were preserved by many different methods. For example, hard-boiled eggs could be pickled in vinegar and fresh eggs could last for up to six months if immersed in a "water-glass" solution (sometimes confused with isinglass, which is made from fish swim bladders).

The water glass (sodium silicate in solution) blocks and seals the pores of the egg, which prevents bacteria from entering and moisture from leaving, so the eggs would last through the winter when the hens were not laying so many.

The following is an edited extract from Reepham Petty Sessions, January 1926 (usually held at the King's Arms).

Mary Lovick was summoned on the information of Arthur Charles Spinks of Scarning (an egg collector for Messrs Sainsbury), for selling eggs not of the quality demanded by the purchaser. Spinks had bought some hen and duck eggs from Mrs Moy, remarking that some looked like water glass eggs. Mrs Moy replied that they came from Mrs Lovick and should be all right.

Spinks had been an egg collector, mainly for Sainsbury, for three years, sometimes taking as many as 5,000 from Reepham Market. If any were not new-laid he would have to bear the loss.

Percival John Hilton, grocer of Reepham, said Spinks brought a box of eggs to his shop on November 25. On December 9 an inspector to Messrs Sainsbury applied the candle test to 22 duck eggs and 18 hen eggs and found that 13 of the hen eggs were preserved. The box was sealed and the eggs taken away to the County Analyst. When informed of Spinks' complaint Mrs Lovick said: "I know I sent about nine preserved eggs to make up two score. I didn't think there was anything wrong in that."

Mary Lovick was fined £5 and £3 18s costs.



Hiltons' Stores in Reepham Market Place (now the police station, in 2017)