

## Further reminiscences of The Ollands

After Mr Kett's interesting article in the Winter [1987] Newsletter, some further reminiscences of The Ollands may be of interest.

I would however query some of the dates given. I can well remember Mr Oppenheim coming to live at The Ollands, the article stated that this was in 1920, I was only three years old at that time and my earliest recollections, at a slightly older age are of the house standing empty. It must have been 1923 or 1924 when Mr Oppenheim moved in, but I am open to correction if anyone knows better or has a longer memory.

Mr Oppenheim brought with him a butler and a chauffeur. Mr London, the butler, lived in the cottage now known as Echo Lodge in Ollands Road. It was not really a lodge but the coachman's cottage, it being adjacent to the coach house and stables. Mr Mair, the chauffeur, lived in one of a pair of cottages in Norwich Road, opposite St Mary's School (where the entrance is to Ollands Park). The other cottage was occupied by a gardener, Mr Jimmy Smith, and his wife (formerly Polly Hill), both well-known Reepham characters. Jimmy liked half a pint, but Polly tried to get him to change his drinking ways. At mid-morning she could be heard over half of Reepham calling 'Cocoa, Willy'. Why she said Willy when his name was Jimmy we never knew. Mr Oppenheim hired some local shooting and also employed a gamekeeper.

The field, now covered by the housing estate called Moor House Close, was nothing to do with the Moor House but was part of the Ollands grounds. It had been let to a farmer as arable land, but Mr Oppenheim stopped letting it and laid it down to grass. Two or three of the boys living in the New Road area went as a deputation to call on Mr Oppenheim to ask for permission to play on the field. This was kindly granted on condition that they did not go into the plantation. Thus, we had a splendid place on which to play football or cricket after school. The Band of Hope football team played their home matches there as well. On the fifth of November each year, on this field, Mr Oppenheim provided a great firework display, supervised by the butler and other members of the staff. There were enormous rockets and other fireworks such as we had never seen before and us youngsters were given sparklers and such like to hold in our hands. The fireworks stopped after Mr Oppenheim moved permanently to France, but we could still use the field, till the property was sold. This privilege was appreciated, and no-one ever abused the conditions that we were not to go into the plantation.

This came to an end when Mr Harmer who, I believe, was connected with the Norwich clothing manufacturing firm of F W Harmer Ltd bought the Ollands. He immediately banned everyone from the field. He required the field for exercising his two riding horses. His groom, Mr W Sturman, lived in the cottage formerly occupied by Oppenheim's chauffeur.

After Mr Oppenheim had gone The Ollands was occupied for a time by Mr and Mrs Rider-Smith. Mrs Rider-Smith was Mr Oppenheim's daughter. The similarity of name may account for the story Mr Kett mentions of Sir Henry Rider Haggard living at The Ollands, which I had never heard before. It is certainly not true that Rider Haggard lived here, and I doubt if the house ever had any connection with him.

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