

A recent find in the Archive is a handmade notebook belonging to Edward Gibbs (the owner of Gibbs Ironmongers Shop in Reepham Market Place). It contains many examples of jokes and riddles that Edward Gibbs scripted for Reepham Troupe of Black Diamonds in the early 1900s. Minstrel groups were a very popular form of entertainment and although professional groups had faded by the early 1900s and were being replaced by vaudeville and music hall, amateur groups continued to flourish.



A contemporary programme from 1911 shows a format of humorous songs and instrumental items, interspersed with comedy patter. A photograph of the Black Diamonds from 1911 shows the group in black make-up and wigs so it is difficult to identify individuals but we can identify the chief comedy characters as they have exaggeratedly large bow-ties. The Interlocutor was master of ceremonies and essentially the 'straight man' while the duo of Tambo and Bones kept the humour going with jokes and riddles.

Marjorie Gibbs, born in 1899, wrote in 'I Remember' (memories of her Reepham childhood in the early 1900s) :-

*'With several people from other parts of town and surrounding district the musical gentlemen of the market place formed a highly successful minstrel troupe, calling themselves 'The Black Diamonds'. Mr Le Neve, from Dereham Road, was Interlocutor, the two corner men were my father, Edward Gibbs, as Bones and Sidney Eglington as Tambo. When the Black Diamonds were formed their first performance was given at a garden fete held in the grounds of Dr. Perry's house. A covered proscenium was erected, the string band accompanied and it was all a huge success. The stage was lit by electricity supplied through the gardens by land line from Mr John Dixon, who had the cycle shop on the corner of Towns End.'*