

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WEST END GARAGE, DEDHAM

By GEORGINA COTTEE

William Ephraim Tapsfield Cottee was a steam-roller driver, born in Canewdon, Essex in 1889 and worked for W.G. Smoothy of Rochford near Southend. His job was to repair and restore roads and it was this that brought him to North-East Essex where he met his future wife, Julia Hunnaball; after their marriage in 1911, they lived with her parents in Threadneedle Street, Dedham and he was employed driving lorries for Clovers in Mill Lane. Within a short time he bought Rose Cottage in Stratford Road and their children, Jim,(1913), Joe and Betty spent their young lives there. Following this he leased the smithy at the western end of the High Street and established West End Garage adapting the building to suit its new purpose. In the mid nineteen-thirties he managed to buy the plot of land on the opposite side of the road including the bungalow in addition to the smithy. Petrol-pumps were placed along the edge of the site at right angles to the road and parallel to the side of the bungalow. Lock-up garages were erected at the back where the workshops now stand. But a few years prior to this in September 1927, the couple's elder son Jim, aged only fourteen, set sail with a friend for Australia on the S.S.Ballarad through the Dreadnought Boys Trust. A four month voyage took them first to Fremantle and thence to Sydney and from there north to Inverell and a sheep station where he settled, sheared sheep, played cricket and generally enjoyed life. It was probably sometime in 1937 when Jim's

father, then forty-eight, requested that he return home to help with the family business; his younger brother Joe had joined the RAF fresh from school. Jim met and married Mabel Carr from Ardleigh but in 1939 he too joined the RAF stationed at Weston-Super-Mare as an instructor until 1945. After demob he returned to the garage but by this time he had two sons, Dennis(1942) and Tony(1944) who would later run the business. Jim's sister Betty, meanwhile, had married George Southgate and they established garage workshops in a building which incorporated the old lock-ups behind the bungalow. William Cottee died in 1955, Dennis joined the RAF straight from school but Tony, upon leaving school at the age of fourteen, became a mechanic in the firm gaining his qualifications eventually through the day-release scheme. Besides general repairs, Tony also drove the taxi to numerous destinations across the southern half of Britain, locally to the station when required and the school-run when requested. General garage work in the fifties and sixties, in addition to car repairs and maintenance, encompassed bicycles and lawnmowers, selling general shop items and cigarettes, delivering paraffin, charging accumulators, washing cars and anything else the customer might require. Jim also leased Stratford Garage from Shell about 1960 before buying it when the Stratford St Mary bypass was built. At the same time the forecourt was laid and new pumps erected at West End.



West End Garage established in the old Smithy, a bicycle display in the window. William Cottee is on the left.

In 1972 Dennis left the RAF and joined the business moving into Inverell, the bungalow behind the pumps named by Jim's parents after Jim's Australian adventure in the thirties. In 1980 Stratford Garage was sold and the workshops behind the bungalow were purchased from George Southgate's widow, Betty, enabling MOT testing to be carried-out at last, there being no facilities for this in the old smithy across the road.

I met Tony in 1966, Jim became ill in 1967/8 and I had already been helping Tony with paperwork in the evening which Jim could no longer cope with. Jim asked me if I would work full-time for him to which I agreed but he died less than two years later at the age of only fifty-five. I have worked at the garage ever since until we closed it in May 2015.

Georgina Cottee

There is a certain irony to the fact that Raymond Erith's practice, a little further down the street, drew up the plans for the workshops and for the kiosk between the pumps, the roof of which reflects Erith's classical style. There can't be many such tiny buildings which have been designed by the man who went on to carry-out the remodelling of numbers ten and eleven Downing Street but needs must when the devil drives; there was little being built in the immediate post-war years and Erith, very sensibly, would take most commissions and that included pig-sties at Stutton!



The Forecourt Kiosk designed by Raymond Erith's practice.



West End Gararge in its heyday, Dennis, Georgina, Mabel and Tony.