

# PAST TIMES

## VILLAGE MEMORIES

*as remembered by Tony Cottee and others  
and told to Georgina Cottee*

Take a step back into the 1950's and beyond; try and imagine the atmosphere of our village, nestling in the Vale. At that time the country was recovering from the effects of World War II and village life was very different from today. Visitors were in the minority and vehicles just as rare. Intermingling with village life were many fascinating characters. The backdrop of Constable scenery would still have been as beautiful, the architecture just as interesting but many more of those buildings had businesses, keeping Dedham more self-contained.

On the corner of **Shoebridge Hill** and **Stratford Road**, at the west end of the High Street, was Freeman's clothes and shoe shop. Bill Freeman, was a pleasant character who lived with his brother Eddie who was deaf and dumb. Bill was always polite and well turned out. Each day he wore a collar and tie and a clean heavy white cotton apron to serve his customers politely.

On the south side of the High Street heading east is **Wheelwright's Cottage**. Next door is an old building which was originally the wheelwright's workshop. Beautifully restored by Harry Humm, a master builder who cleverly placed his initials HH within the pattern of the brickwork, it was used by Harry Griffith, an antiques dealer, for storage. Humm, a rugged looking man with longish hair, topped with a trilby hat, was often seen passing through the High Street with a small cart attached to the back of his bicycle. He had made it look like a miniature gypsy caravan. In it he transported a variety of small terrier dogs that looked out of every window. More dogs would travel in a basket on the front of the bicycle and on a frying pan fixed on the crossbar, its paws resting on the handlebar. In the evening this menagerie was to be seen parked outside the **Sun Hotel**, or the **Rose & Crown** public house, which was near **No. 1 Dunton Almshouses**, where Harry lived. He would sit outside playing his accordion, after a little light refreshment.



*Rose & Crown P.H.*

Further down the High Street on the left is the **White House**, once owned by Rev C. Woods, who took the two top storeys off, perhaps to enable a better outlook for his new house, **The Croft**, which had been built in the grounds. In the 1950's **Littlegarth School** moved into the White House and was run by the founders, Miss Betty Mallet and Miss Barbara Erith. Next door was once the blacksmith's cottage and the forge, which became **Dedham's first Garage**. This was started in the 1920's by William Ephraim Tapsfield Cottee. By the mid-fifties it was run by his son Jim Cottee. Jim was a mechanic but also mended bicycles and lawn mowers, delivered paraffin and sold petrol at about 3s.1d. a gallon (20p).

## PAST TIMES



He would open up almost anytime, to oblige a customer in need of goods or petrol and also provided a local taxi service and long distance for local gentry. The **West End Garage** was developed from the original village forge. It now operates only from the north side of the road and is run by the third generation, Tony and Dennis Cottee, who although

they no longer sell petrol are responsible for keeping many grateful local customers' cars on the road.

Further down on the right, past the **Assembly Rooms** (then called the **Hewitt Memorial Hall**) and set back from the road, is **Dedham House** which was owned by Raymond Erith, the well-known architect. He had many commissions around the country including the renovation of Nos. 10 and 11 Downing Street, and the new building of number 12, which took place from 1959/62.

Almost opposite Dedham House, there is a small property on the corner of **Threadneedle Street** with an unusual square bow window, now an estate agent, Smiths. This used to be **Percy Hunnaball's fish shop**. Percy is remembered for his delicious homemade ice cream, which he would deliver on his bike, with a large icebox on the front.



The next building along on the left is the **Old Telephone Exchange** which was Raymond Erith's architects office, now Quinlan and Francis Terry Architects LLP. Previously a part of this building was also the kindly **Mrs Hitchcock's sweet shop**, perfectly situated opposite **School Lane**. Tony remembers running down to school each morning, picking up a stick along the way, rattling it along the metal posts of the little Orchard as he ran, pushing open the sweet shop door which set off a large clanging bell, that continued to clang long after Mrs Hitchcock appeared. Decisions had to be made, which sweets from the selection of large screw-top jars on the shelves, before dashing down School Lane to the primary school.

On the corner of **Princl Lane**, was **Ted Eley's Bakery**. Tony remembers being sent down on a Saturday mornings to the bakers to wait for the fresh bread or hot rolls to come out of the oven in the bake house behind. As he waited with the delicious aroma of freshly baked bread drifting through the bake-house, he would watch Frank Payne mixing the dough, always with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and ash flying - long before the constraints of 'health and safety.' This did not deter the young shopper who would run home to see the hot crisp rolls split open by mother, Mabel, and would eat them eagerly, dripping with butter.

In a tiny cottage in Princel Lane called **The Nook**, lived an old lady and memorable character Mrs Tatum, who made her own furniture polish with beeswax and sometimes wore a curled wig in a gentle shade of blue. Mrs Tatum, knew Tornado Smith from Boxford, the famous motorcyclist who rode the 'Wall of Death' on Southend Pier. Lodging with her were two well-known characters, Jimmy Gunn and Frankie Ambrose, who cut up and sold logs. Frankie was also a master thatcher. A tale is still told of him falling from a tree as he cut the branch he was sifting on!

Back to the High Street and opposite the bakery, on the corner of School Lane, was **Shead and Dines** who delivered parcels around the area in a small lorry marked '*Ipswich Carriages - Colchester*'. They would also take rabbits to Colchester market for local people. Next door, at the back of the old Post Office, was where Bill Watson the village cobbler repaired boots and shoes. Crossing back to the Dedham Bookshop, which was previously the **Barber's Shop** where the young lads, with a mind for a more fashionable haircut, would be dispatched to see Mr Jarvis, pleading. "Not too much off please Mr Jarvis!" Before they knew it, the electric sheers were straight over their heads with no attention to the plea. After paying their 6d (2½p) they would leave, shorn and dripping with *Brylcream*.

Next door to the bookshop was another family business, Mr Eddie **Ray's Hardware Shop**, a real Aladdin's cave, crammed with stock and with barely a space anywhere. Mr Ray knew where to find things and customers were rarely disappointed. He had been in the Essex Yeomanry during World War I, so was very at home on a horse. It is remembered by some that he rode down the High Street holding a sword and declaring the outbreak of the World War II. Sadly, his shop was burned down in the 1970s.



*Ray's Hardware Shop:  
'Grandma's Greenhouse'*

Next door was **Harry Griffith's antique shop**, many years before it had been *The Old Curiosity Shop* and is now sells household and garden treasures, and paintings by local artist Terry Jeffrey. Next door, slightly set back from the High Street, is **Evans & Son butchers' shop**, then run by Cecil Evans, when the Sunday joint of meat was approximately 15s (75p) and that would have to be enough for three days. Next door is the **Sun Hotel**, an old coaching inn. Further along is the present-day chemist (or *pharmacy*) which once housed the very popular grocery store **Spearing & Son**. People would travel miles to this shop with its wonderful delicatessen, fresh local produce and a great selection of other goods. The aroma of freshly ground coffee would emanate throughout the shop, all were served very politely by Fred and Jack Spearing and local staff.

Once again groceries were delivered around the village mainly by the young lads on their trade bikes. Tony Clifford remembers this as being his first job, aged fourteen. He remembers delivering to the furthest away first, enabling him to cycle slowly back through the Drift, past the playing field in order to catch a little of the local football match before returning back to base. A little further along from Spearings was (and is) the **Co-op**, which had once been a branch of W.H. Smiths. On the corner of Mill Lane is **The Essex Rose** which was also a café then. At the back of **Royal Square** (which was called **Market Square** until the visit of Queen Mary in 1937), was **Gooch's Chemist Shop**. Inside on the right hand wall were a fascinating amount of small wooden drawers containing many pills and potions.



*Tony Cottee on the Mill pond*

Down **Mill Lane**, was once the busy **Clover's Flour Mill**, owned by Harold Clover, that provided employment for many people. It was to the mill pool that the young were drawn and where many learnt to swim with the guidance of older ones. As the young ones felt more confident they would swim across to a small island close to the edge of the pool and the next step was to swim right across to the other side with an older child. At the age of nine or so, after an exiting afternoon, Tony remembers running home and excitedly announcing to his unsuspecting mother Mabel, "I swam across the Mill Pool today Mum!"

In the winter months, the meadow on the way to Flatford would be flooded and frozen over. Keen locals would get their skates out to enjoy the annual recreation. Others would play their own version of ice hockey, dressed in duffel coats, short trousers and lace-up shoes, while some made long slides across the ice.

Memories that conjure up a picture of fun, freedom and adventure, far removed from the modern distractions of TV, computers and mobile phones. Local boys would also play football in the road, getting most put out at the sound of any approaching motor car which would disturb their game. Long hot summer days spent tracking across the fields in gangs, communicating on their 'telephones', made from tin cans connected by string. Girls would gather blackberries, returning home for mothers to make them into delicious pies and jam.

One last memory of those past years, still to be seen is the unusual and elegant sight of the Greek temple boathouse, built beside the river on the way to Stratford St Mary. It was built in 1939, and the architect, once again, was Raymond Erith.

*Georgina Cottee*