

Dedham's West End Part 2

The White House, dating from the eighteenth century, was partially destroyed in the 1930s when it was bought by the Rev. Cyril Woods. He removed the upper storeys leaving only the ground floor with a loft above it and turned the western half into a garage for the Croft, a large new house which he built on the back garden. During WW2 two surviving ground floor rooms to the left of the front door were used on Thursday afternoons from 3 to 4.30 as War Work Rooms for knitting and sewing sessions. Then and for some years afterwards they were also used as classrooms by Littlegarth School. When Allan and Gaye Drummond moved into the house in 1994 they made bedrooms with dormer windows inside the existing attic but in 2007, after they had left, the top of the house was demolished once again and replaced by the present upper storeys and a redesigned roof.

When William Ephraim Tapsfield Cottee came to Dedham he was employed as a steam-roller driver working on road repairs in this area for a firm at Rochford. In 1911 he married Julia Hunnaball and soon afterwards bought Rose Cottage on the Stratford Road where their three children grew up. Being a motor and cycle engineer he leased the forge next door to the White House, which had been the premises of a blacksmith called Rogers, and established the West End Garage.

John Jennings recalled that the eastern end with its own door and window on to the street had previously been an ice cream shop run by Italians, who had a motorbike with a sidecar to take their wares round the district. Cornets cost a penny and there was a special device for sandwiching the twopenny wafers. These were made by putting the bottom wafer into the machine, then the ice cream was squeezed in on top before a lever brought the upper wafer down and fixed it into position. After the shop closed an ice cream sign still survived inside the garage workshop.

In the mid 1930s William Cottee bought the plot opposite his garage with the bungalow on it and he set up petrol pumps along the side. He also built lock-up garages, later incorporated into the workshop which his daughter Betty's husband George Southgate established on the land at the back. In 1937 William asked his son Jim, who had spent nine years working on a sheep station near Inverell in Australia, to come home and take over the running of the business. William and Julia lived in the bungalow, which they named Inverell after that town in New South Wales and when they married in 1939 Jim and his wife Mabel moved into West End Cottage opposite. They had two sons, Anthony who worked in the garage straight from school, qualifying as a mechanic at technical college through the day-release scheme and Dennis who joined him in 1972 after service in the RAF.



The houses on the south side of the High Street in the early 20th century showing the White House still at its full height and the open field opposite before the bungalows were built in 1935. In the centre of the photograph is the barn where the wheelwright had his workshop. Wordley Cottage is on the far left.



The White House in 1902

Jim was in charge of the garage from the late 1930s, except during WW2 while he was serving in the RAF. He did not just work as a mechanic but turned his hand to a whole range of other jobs such as mending bicycles or lawnmowers, delivering paraffin and running a local taxi service which included a weekly school run and long-distance journeys for local residents, increasingly undertaken by Anthony. He leased the garage at Stratford St Mary from Shell, who sold it to the Cottees in the 1960s when petrol sales fell after the new A12 bypass diverted most of the through traffic. They parted with it in 1980 after George Southgate's death, when they were able to use his former workshop in Dedham. Jim Cottee died aged only fifty-five in 1969 but Mabel lived until 2005 and was still helping with serving petrol well into her eighties. Anthony's wife Georgina was in charge of the office from 1968 until the garage closed down and was sold in 2015.

The main part of its High Street workshop has become a garage for the White House with a flat built above it. The remaining space and Mabel's West End Cottage have been replaced by two small houses, Cottee's Cottage and West End Cottage. The workshop behind the bungalow opposite has recently been demolished and a new house is being built on the site. Only the Phoenix petrol sign in front of Inverell remains as a reminder of the West End Garage, much valued and fondly remembered by many of Dedham's older inhabitants.

The last house next to the Cottees' original premises is now called Wordley Cottage after William Wordley who lived there with his wife Edith, their son Reginald and daughters Gladys and Marion, who did not marry and outlived the rest of the family by many years. When I remember them Gladys could be seen walking to Stratford St Mary every day to catch the bus to Ipswich, where she worked at Alderton's shoe shop in the Buttermarket and Marion was housekeeper to Jack Spearing, retired owner of Dedham's renowned grocery. Behind their house Hall Cottage beside the Assembly Rooms was built by the Church between the wars to provide a house for the Verger and Caretaker. In 1939 he was the aptly-named Francis Godbold who lived there with his widowed sister and her two schoolboy sons.

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This account draws on an excellent article by Georgina Cottee on the West End Garage published in the Dedham Vale Society Newsletter No. 79, Winter 2015-16. I am very grateful to her for all her help and for permission to reproduce her photograph of the Cottee family at the garage. I am also indebted to Veronica Cottee and Sally Gotelee for useful information and to Allan Drummond for photographs of the White House.



A later photograph showing all that was left of the White House after Cyril Woods removed the upper floors in the 1930s and used it as a garage.



The White House with dormer windows for attic bedrooms inserted in 1995.



Cottees' original premises still in use in 2007. The earlier ice cream shop was in the part on the left.



Dennis, Georgina, Mabel and Anthony Cottee at the West End Garage c.2002