

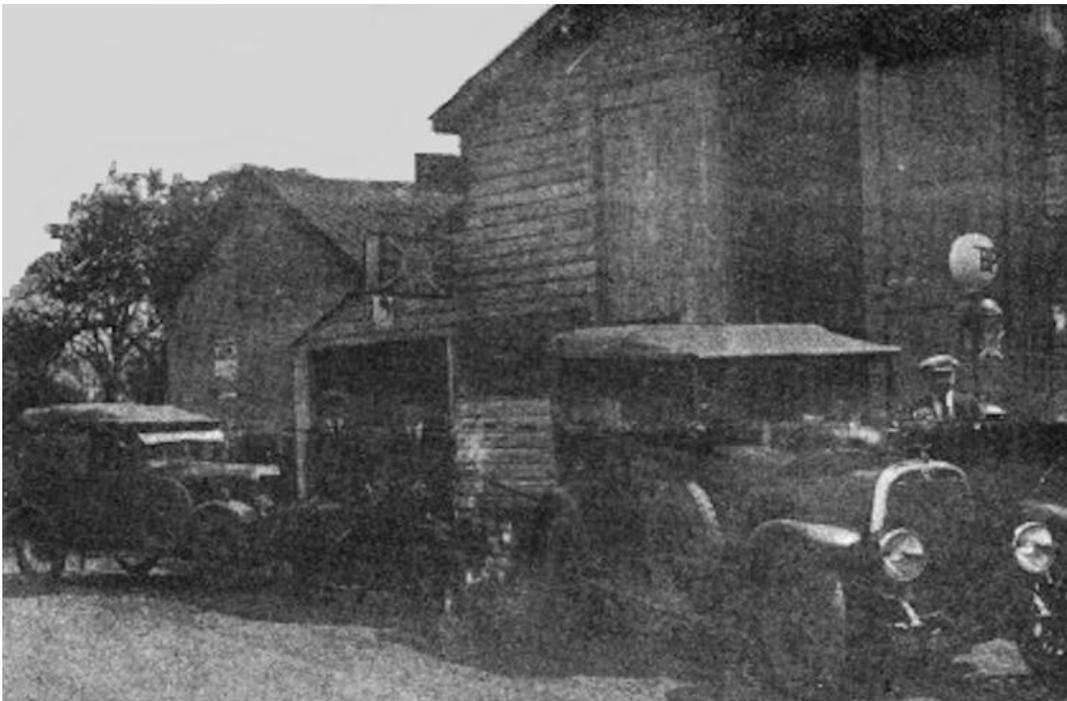


History:	
Topic:	Chevington Garage
Date of Record:	August 2023
Author:	Author name
Notes:	Eric Rolfe pictured beside one of the haulage vehicles in the late 1930s.

## Chevington Garage

Taken from a Bury Free Press article, about 1979.

### Time has stood still in village garage



**Chevington garage in the late 1920's — little has changed in the last 50 years. Pictured (from left) are: Gordon Clarke, Fred Wallace and Alf Rolfe.**

On a row of rusty nails hang the relics from the golden age of motoring. For more than 50 years time has stood still at the white timbered garage in the centre of Chevington. The owner, Alfred Rolfe, spent his life trying to preserve the tools and craftsmanship he learnt as a young apprentice engineer. When he died last summer at the age of 77 the garage became a living museum.

Alfred, a farmers son, started the business in 1919 with a three ton Bellsuze truck and a Model T Ford he bought for £17. Cars were still a rare sight on the roads and most of his work was involved with cycle repairs.



Garage owner Mr Alf Rolfe  
who died last summer  
at the age of 77

### **Band**

He set up a haulage and taxi service for the village. One of his most regular fares were the local dance band.

By the 1930s Alfred had built up a fleet of six heavy lorries and a staff of 12. It was the heyday of the business.

After the war trade had become slack and with the approach of the 1970s it had fallen into decline. Eric Rolfe (69) of Church Road Chevington remembers his brother as a proud and independant man.

### **Main Aim**

"Alfred believed the old ways were the best. He liked to leave things as they were in the garage - that was his wild way I expect." said Eric. "He loved that old garage and being there was his main aim in life. It was like a second home to him. He would open the garage at 9 am and travel home to Depden for lunch at 5 pm when everyone was ready to finish and get away he would still be pottering about."

"Alfred would have his tea there and sit in his office working until 10 or 11 at night - then he would travel into Bury St Edmunds to post his letters.



Mr Eric Rolfe who worked at the garage for 47 years.

## Memories

Mechanic Fred Wallace. (63) of Brookes Corner, Chevington, has fond memories of his old boss. Said Fred "He was a man who would never throw anything away. The garage was full of old motor magazines, catalogues and spare parts. He even saved the wrapping paper from his pipe tobacco."

his greatest joy was when someone came into the garage and said something like "I don't suppose you have a gasket set for an old Morris Cowley?" His face would light up and he would disappear into the stock room. When he came out he would always have the spare part in his hand.



Fred Wallace with one of the relics from the garage. A manual brake tester.

## Respect

Fred started work at the garage as a boy of 13 for a wage of 2/6d a week. During his 50 years service he built up a great deal of respect for Alfred. He said: "Alfred was a master craftsman on the lathe and no-one could match him as a welder."

Another garage worker Job Willis (65) of Belinda, Chevington, recalls that Alfred kept a 1911 Sunbeam car in the back of the garage. The car was in good running order and had been looked after meticulously for over 50 years. "You could say he worshipped that car," said Job, "He kept it under lock and key and you were a very privileged person if you ever got to see it." The car has been sold and the rest of the garage and its contents were to have gone under the hammer on Wednesday. But for the time being it remains a working memorial to a man who turned his back on the modern motoring world.



Job Willis shows off the old garage till.

## Crammed

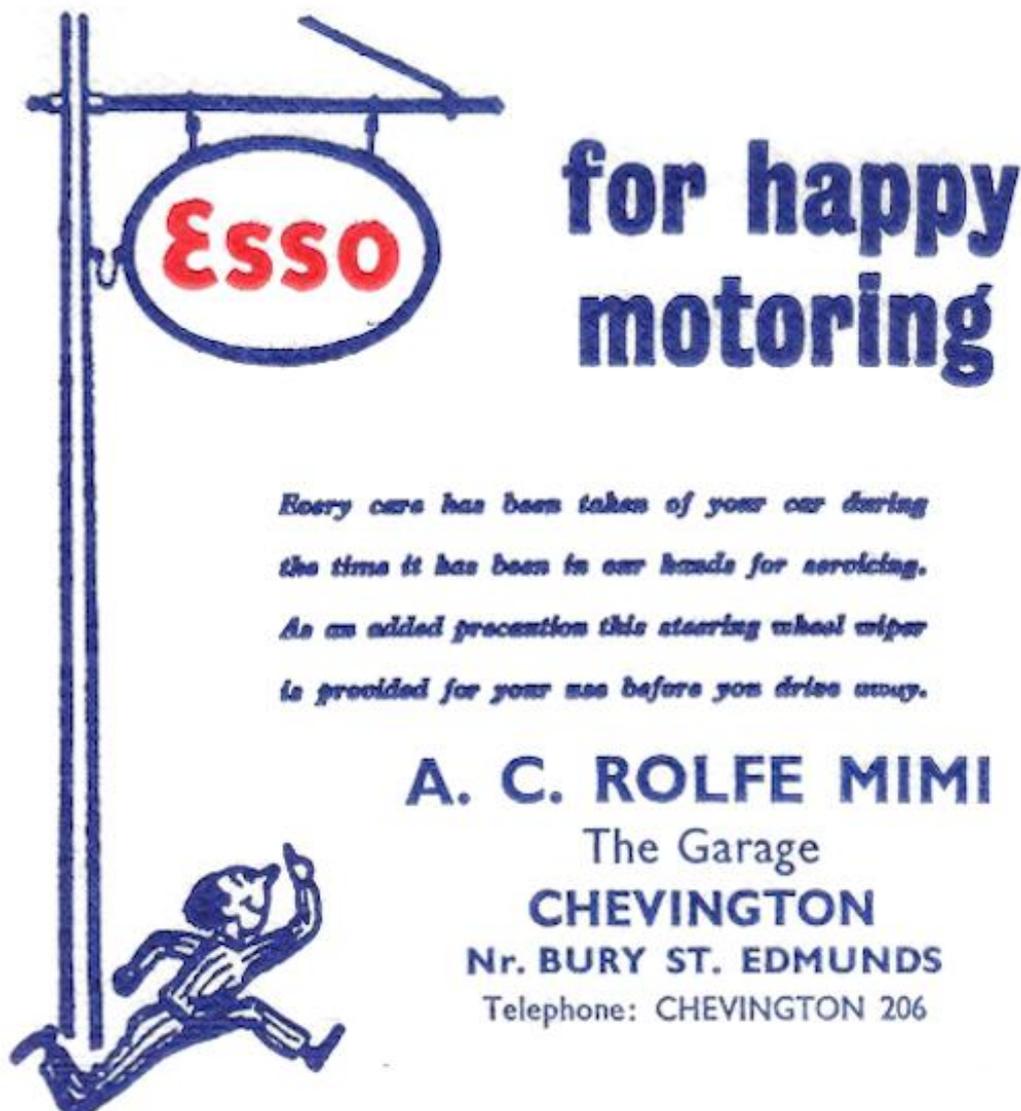
The garage itself is crammed like an Aladin's Cave from floor to ceiling with priceless relics. On the walls hang gasket sets for Model T Fords, motorcycle drive belts and old number plate stencils. In one corner stands a hand operated oil dispensing unit, in another a manual brake tester and everywhere lie stacks of motor magazines going back to the 1920s.

between the wooden beams fly a colony of sparrows who shared the garage as a home with Alfred for as long as anyone can remember. In the dim half light of dusk it is possible to stand in the garage and imagine the scene as it was 50 years ago.

## Bury Free Press 1979

Here is a scan of a tissue that was left in each car after a service.

*Every care has been taken of your car during  
the time it has been in our hands for servicing.  
As an added precaution this steering wheel wiper  
is provided for your use before you drive away.*



Picture of tissue courtesy of David Willcox

## **Appendix A – Rolfe Family Background**

Alfred Cawston Rolfe the owner of Chevington Garage from the 1920s to the 1970's was born in Pakenham. His grandfather was William Rolfe (1834-1909) was also born in Pakenham. Wilfred had a varied employment record. From census records he is listed as a labourer, then he set up a laundry business in Thurston by 1881, before progressing to work as a farmer at Norton Road, Thurston in 1991, but by 1901 had returned to being a launderer operating from his home on the Great Green still in Thurston.

In 1863 William married Maria Sophia Howe (1834-1919) from Bury St Edmunds, who helped run the laundry business, later assisted by their daughter Sarah (1869) who was born in Lewisham. Their other children were Elizabeth Maria (1867) and Jane (1870-1952) also born in Lewisham, William Noble (1873-1955) born in Forest Hill employed whilst a teenager as a market porter, and Edward (1876) a grocer and Frederick John (1877-1877) born in Thurston. The explanation behind the birthplaces for four of his children being outside Suffolk is informed by the 1871 Census, where the family can be found living at 11 The Grove, Lewisham, where their father William was labouring on building sites. No doubt work was readily available as part of the expansion of the London suburbs.

By 1901 William's son William then took over running a Nene House Farm, Grimstone End, Pakenham probably in the late 1890's, and then to Mill Farm, Higham by 1911. He married Mabel Louise Cawston (1876-1973) from Walsham le Willows in 1897 and they had four children. They were William Neville Rolfe (1898) born in Rattlesden, Alfred Cawston Rolfe (1900-1978), Maisie Rolfe (1905) and Eric Russell Rolfe (1908-2000) all born in Higham.

Alfred was to become proprietor of Chevington Garage and lived locally at The Beeches, Depden with his wife Evelyn Gladys Florence Bennett (1904-1978) who he married in 1939. There are no recorded offspring. He was assisted in the garage and haulage business by brother Eric Rolfe who mainly worked as a lorry driver and who ultimately lived at East View House, Chedburgh, with his widowed mother until her death.

As the records above indicate Alfred was a hardworking man, and several of the mechanics and drivers who worked for him lived in Hargrave. He also appears to be a fair minded and forgiving employer as evidenced by the following court case reported in the local press.

## **Appendix B - Young Mechanics Lapse Prompts Employers Kindness – 1929**

Sometimes one lapse can taint a lifetime, but it appears that having been found guilty of theft from his employer in 1929 and reprieve by the kindness of his employer, Albert Starling of Hargrave went on to live a successful family life in the Sheffield area of South Yorkshire.

Albert Edward Starling (1908-1962) was born the son of a Cowlinge family headed by Robert Albert Starling (1875-1956) a shepherd and his wife Jane Eliza Hurrell (1880-1931) from Whepstead. He fathered at least seven children: Julia Jane (1899-1978), May (1901-1977), Joseph Samuel Henry (1903-1967), Kenneth (1906-1941) and Albert Edward, Prudence Margaret (1913), and Doris E (1916).

After his run in with the authorities Albert eventually settled and lived in Sheffield having married a local woman Annie Gregory (1910-2001) from Guilthwaite, Yorkshire in 1935.

**The following report was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 19th January 1929.**

**YOUNG MECHANIC'S LAPSE.**

*Hargrave Engineer Pleads for Man Who Robbed Him.*

*Magistrates' Lenience.*

*The story of motor mechanic who was alleged to have tampered with the fastenings of a door, after robbing his employer's till, in order to throw investigators off the scent, was told to Ald. J. Ridley Hooper, at an Occasional Court, at the Bury St. Edmund's Police Station, on Monday morning, when Albert Edward Starling, of Hargrave, was charged with stealing £5 10s. in Treasury notes, the property of his employer, Alfred Cawston Rolfe, motor engineer, of the Garage, Chevington, on Saturday, January 12th.*

*Rolfe gave evidence that Starling had a key to the premises and was left in sole charge when witness was away. On Friday witness saw some Treasury notes, silver and coppers in the till, but when he went to it at about 10.30 a.m. on the following day he found that the*

**NOTES HAD BEEN TAKEN.**

*Speaking to his employees generally, he said, "The notes have gone," and Starling stated, "Oh! that's a funny thing. Where have they gone then?" Witness then examined the premises and found that an outhouse door had been tampered with. He sent for P.-c. Stiff, who later searched Starling. They then asked accused to fetch his overcoat from the garage and watched him do so through glass partition. As Starling was returning with the coat they saw him slip behind chimney. This aroused suspicions, and, while P.-c. Stiff was searching the coat, witness went to the chimney, and, after hunting about among some soot, found a handkerchief, in which, tied in several knots were Treasury notes of the value £5 10s. (produced). Witness took his "find" to the constable and Starling and the latter said: "I will admit I put them there. They are yours, I took the money from the till; I was hard up."*

**AN ALLEGED ADMISSION.**

*P.-c. Stiff corroborated, and said that the door had not been forced from the outside. When he searched defendant, he found a 10s. note in his wallet, and £1 4s. 7 ½ d. in silver and coppers in his overcoat. When charged, defendant said: "I don't wish to say anything. I am sorry I did it. I was hard up. What do you think it will cost me?"*

*Starling was remanded until Wednesday, bail being allowed in his own surety of £10.*

*Before the Magistrates, on Wednesday, defendant pleaded guilty, elected summary jurisdiction, and asked to be leniently dealt with.*

**A TRUST BETRAYED.**

*Prosecutor repeated the facts and stated that Starling had been in his employ for eight years. Replying to the Magistrates' Clerk (Mr. T. Wilson), he said that he had had no previous trouble with defendant, who had been a very good fellow, worked hard, and, as far as witness knew, was absolutely honest. He had been in a position of trust. His wages were 9d. an hour for a 48-hour week, and he often made overtime. He was a single man, lodging at Hargrave.*

*The Clerk: Do you wish to offer any explanation why you took the money?*

*Defendant: I was rather pushed for money.*

*Prosecutor: I think the lad is not to blame for this entirely I think he is rather kind-hearted and has been spending money on insurance policies. Witness added that did not wish to press the charge and that had taken proceedings in the interests of defendant's future.*

#### **BOUND OVER**

*After a brief retirement of the Magistrates, the Chairman said they had taken in to consideration that defendant's employer had spoken well of him and he would be bound over in the sum of £5, and must pay the costs £1. "You have been very lucky to get off," added the Chairman.*

*Starling who appeared to feel his position expressed his thanks.*

#### **Appendix C – Notices of Death and Funerals**

**The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 20th July 1973.**

*ROLFE - On July 15. 1973. peacefully at St Mary's Hospital, Bury St Edmunds, MABEL LOUISE, aged 96 years wife of the late W N Rolfe, formerly of Chevington and dear mother of Alf, Maisie, Eric and Grace. Funeral service at the Woolpit Room, Woolpit, today, Friday July 20. at 11 am. Flowers to L. Fulcher Ltd. please*

**The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 3rd March 1978.**

*Mr A. C. Rolfe*

*The funeral of Mr Alfred Cawston Rolfe, of The Beeches, Depden, took place at Depden Parish Church on February 17. The Rev D. Shaw conducted the service.*

*Mr Rolfe died in the West Suffolk Hospital on February 11. He was 77.*

*Mourners were: Mr and Mrs Edwards, Mr and Mrs Rolfe, Mr and Mrs Read, Mrs Wyard-Scott, Mrs Brinkley, Mr and Mrs Goodchild, Mrs Redit, Mrs K. Rabett, Mr and Mrs E. Weingaertry, Mrs V. Collins, Mr and Mrs D. Stanford, Mrs A. Stanford, Mr A. Seeley, Mrs M. Ralph, Mrs P. Green, Mr and Mrs R. Woollard, Mrs Last, Mrs R. Jenkins, Mr and Mrs Marshall, Mr and Mrs S. Bradfield, Miss E. Gower, Mr J Miles, Miss D. Miles, Mr J. Wallace, Mr J. Willis, Mrs R. George, Mr O. Pettit, Mrs M. Miles, Mr J. Covill, Mrs J. Ashman, Mr and Mrs C. Jarvis, Mrs A. Toll, Mr and Mrs J. Loynes, Mrs H. Dean, Mrs S. Fozden, Mr D. Willcox, Messrs C. J. and S. A. Mason.*

*Mr and Mrs R. Smith, Mr B. Banks, Mr D. Snell, Mr and Mrs H. Cawston, Mrs Beaumont, Mr C. Meehan, Mr and Mrs Monty Smith, Mr and Mrs M. Read, Mr and Mrs G. Martin, Mr K. Rogers, Messrs "Bill" and "Tom" Mann, Mr and Mrs G. Mackay, Mr D. Clarkson, Mr R Tink, Mr C. Thurston, Mr Goodchild, Mr and Mrs Redit, Mr and Mrs K. Read, Mr and Mrs G. Ward, Mr R. Rolfe, Mrs J. Goodchild, Mrs S. Brinkley, Mr J. Curtis, Mr E. Rous, Mr and Mrs C. Young, Miss D. Peck, Mr and Mrs R. Rolfe, Mr E. Rolfe.*