

## A NOTE ON BLAKENEY GARAGE

By Monica White

*Blakeney Garage is unusual for its date in that it was designed by an architect specifically for its purpose and site. As a result it complements older buildings in the vicinity and enhances the appearance of the village. This note outlines the stages by which it reached its present form.*

At first sight Blakeney Garage appears to be relatively old. The weathered pantiles, the flint and brick construction and the wavy ridgeline of the main building all suggest an old building modified for its present purpose. In fact, it is a twentieth century building dating from 1919-1923.

The first building was put up on a field adjacent to Morston Road by Herbert Pye in 1919. The site had been given to him by his father, a farmer and carrier, who owned land in Blakeney, including much of the area in the angle between Westgate and Morston Road. Herbert Pye, senior, had first offered his son a site on the Low Quay but Herbert, junior, had turned this down, believing that it was too small to allow for future development. The field selected for the garage had served as a recreation ground for troops stationed in Blakeney during the 1914-1918 war and had seen several fiercely contested sports competitions between the troops and the local lads.

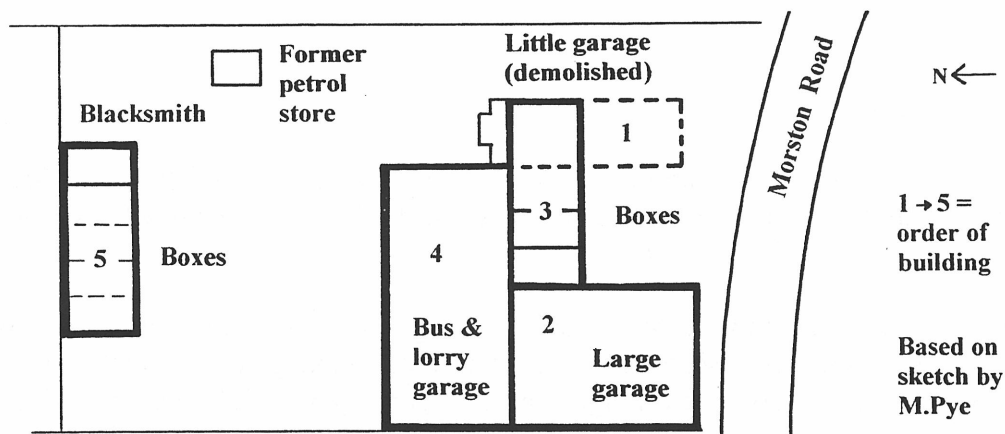
The first garage was a low, single-storey, building at right angles to the road, but in 1923 it was partly replaced by the present workshop designed by John Page, a noted local architect. It is believed that Page provided drawings and a plan but had no role in the construction. His design reflected the style of the various non-residential buildings dominating the western end of the village, including boat sheds, stables and a blacksmith's for repairing ploughshares and carts, as well as a former maltings.



A local builder, Meadows Grimes, was employed to build the garage, using traditional methods and materials. Herbert himself toured the countryside looking for suitable roofing materials and found some roof trusses lying in a field near Wells. These had probably come from some local agricultural building, or possibly from an old industrial building in Wells.

The trusses were raised in the traditional way using ropes and brick pillars. Herbert was advised that the roof needed to be strengthened with extra supports but because of the cost implications none were provided. Consequently the roof has sagged over the years to form its distinctive wavy profile. The pantiles, bought from local farmers, were already weathered when the garage was built. The timber lintels of the windows and doors were also second-hand, obtained from old farm buildings.

A bus and lorry garage was also added during the 1920s together with a number of brick and flint 'boxes'. One of these was occupied by a blacksmith, then essential for car repairs. This was closed in 1939, soon after the declaration of war.



Until 1939 the garage sold cars and the original large display windows can still be seen, though they are now partly filled with breeze blocks. At the garage Herbert Pye repaired farm machinery as well as cars, ran a taxi and school bus service, charged accumulators and batteries, and leased out lorries for the sugar beet and carrot harvests. By 1939 a total of 32 men were employed. The wages were not high, but the working conditions were good and staff turnover relatively low.

Originally the petrol was kept in cans in a pit. Collecting the petrol was dangerous and on one occasion a workman was overcome by fumes and had to be rescued. This led to the purchase of two mechanical pumps. At first these pumps could deliver only one gallon but pumps were gradually improved and by the late 1920s they could deliver five gallons. During the early 1930s a generator was installed to provide electricity and the garage then had a DC electric petrol pump as well as an oil fountain in which the oil was pushed up by compressed air.

During the war the garage was the headquarters of the local Home Guard, Herbert Pye being the Commanding Officer, and for the first year of the war it also housed the local ambulance and the Auxiliary Fire Service pump. The garage changed hands in 1948 but subsequently the various buildings were used for different purposes (including an engineering workshop, a chandlers, and pottery supplies – which remains in the old bus and lorry garage). In 1993 the front buildings once again become a petrol station and repair workshop.

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