

## The Much Remembered ODTAA Garage

A Community History inspired by *Then and Now*, Tewkesbury Direct April 2011

So many people remember the garage with so many start-up problems that it was called "One Damn Thing After Another". Several people claim the name was popularised by a book of the same name written by John Masefield.<sup>1</sup>

Wikipedia confirms this and helps us with the earliest date the garage was probably opened: 1926. *ODTAA*, written by John Masefield (1878 - 1967). was first published in February 1926).<sup>2</sup>

This is confirmed by a Town Council Minute of 1927 when it approved building plans: for a 'Garage with Flat over with Petrol Storage Tanks'. Mr Orchard was the applicant and he was also successful in asking for a Petrol Licence to store 2000 Gallons.<sup>3</sup> There was also a "useful shop".<sup>4</sup>

Ed Jones agrees with Mr. Orchard being the first owner/manager but disagrees who was the author of the name! *"My granddad, George Greening, was the bricklayer/foreman for the garage and the two adjoining houses, Copperfield and Trotwood. I think a Mr Orchard financed the project, together with the house in Conigree Lane called Walton Sashes. Our family legend has it that grandad named it ODTAA because everything that could go wrong with the build did, hence One Damned Thing After Another."*<sup>5</sup>

I still wonder if I am correct that Thomas Jordan owned this garage. He did own a garage on Gloucester Road.<sup>6</sup> If so, he was still there in 1933 when J A Mollison, the air record breaker, caused local excitement by running out of petrol at Tewkesbury. He was "*not recognised by the garage owner T C Jordan at his garage on Gloucester Road*".<sup>7</sup>

I believe that Vic Watson bought the Jordan garage empire, including also Tewkesbury Car Mart.. He was refused permission for the erection of a petrol pump in 1955. He evidently overcame the objection.

Jane Thorndale was a visitor during childhood, although she now works here. *"As a child born at the end of the 1940s, I remember when we first acquired a car and the excitement it brought us. My sister Karen and I would sit in the cramped back of the black Ford Anglia with its functional leather seats that were nothing like the sprung seating we find in today's vehicles and travel to places around the Cotswolds and beyond.*

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Biggs 07904516273

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia: Its title stands for *One Damn Thing After Another*. It opens with establishing narrative describing the fictional South American nation of Santa Barbara which "lies far to leeward of the Sugar States, is at the angle of the continent, with two coasts, one facing to the north, the other east. The novel inspired a work for orchestra, also titled *ODTAA*, by Doreen Carwithen.

<sup>3</sup> TREG 12/11/1927 3/3

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Milway, Sheppards Mead

<sup>5</sup> Ed Jones: so named because the original sash windows were "left over from a job at Walton House" in Ashchurch Road and some of the early houses in Abbots Road. I don't know if he was the same Orchard managing the garage.

<sup>6</sup> Echo 16-8-1930. Jordan may have owned a garage at the Odessa.

<sup>7</sup> Tewkesbury Register, 13/05/1933 p1/1

*Our grandparents on my father's side lived in Stourport on Severn and up until we had the car, journeys from Cheltenham had been made infrequently and always by train. Once we became the proud owners of a vehicle we were able to make visits much more often. There were no motorways in those days and the journey took well over an hour to travel the distance. My father who was an eloquent man would ask us questions all along the seemingly endless route to help pass the time.*

*One place that he always commented upon along the way was the ODTAA garage. "What does ODTAA stand for?" he would quiz us from the front seat. We would scream with delight as we repeated the well learned answer "One Damned Thing After Another!" - it felt good to be able to curse a bit as in those days children were supposed to behave politely at all times.*

*One day we had real reason to thank the ODTAA garage. Vehicles in those days were not always reliable and, after the long journey to and from Stourport, the little black car began to flag. We were just entering Tewkesbury across the bridge and past the Black Bear pub when it started to backfire. We limped through town and onto the forecourt of the garage. Up went the bonnet and the garage owner in oily boiler suit and greasy hands took a look. After a few minutes tinkering, he found the problem and fixed it with much banging and clattering. Soon we were on our way again grateful that he was able to help us."<sup>8</sup>*

In 1938 The Town Council approved plans to build an "extension of the ODTAA garage".<sup>9</sup> I am not sure then if Mr Orchard was the manager or owner, probably the former. He was certainly living there for the 1939-1940 Electoral Roll: Albert Rolfe ORCHARD and Effie ORCHARD [his sister] of the ODTAA Flat, Gloucester Road.<sup>10</sup>

Then we have a gap in knowledge until the 1950s. Christine Romeo recalls that, "*during the '50s my father worked at Tewkesbury Car Mart and came home with many tales, including how the ODTAA became named*".<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Skingsley was the manager for many years but then went to Ebdons Cheltenham.<sup>12</sup> Len Fletcher was friendly with Paul, the son of Mr Skingsley's who managed the garage (1958 to early 60's) and spent a lot of time with him at the garage.<sup>13</sup>

Alan Biggs recalled: "*From 1969 till about 1974 I worked at the ODTAA garage under the then manager Glynn Evans and I think the garage was owned by a Mr. J.Shill who was a Director of a large garage in the Bath Road, Cheltenham, at this moment the name of the garage is eluding me.*"<sup>14</sup>

Ed Jones agrees with some of the names: "*In the 1950s, the manager was Mr Sid. Skinsley (sic) who lived there with his wife and son, Paul. I believe Mr Skingsley was an army colleague of Mr Watson and I think he was still there when it was sold off to Wycliffe. I remember Don Aldridge working there as a mechanic around the same time*

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Thorndale, Public Relations Officer, Severn Vale Housing Society Limited

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Snarey: Snippets of Tewkesbury Yesteryear; published for the Mayoral Charities of Cllr. Philip Workman, 2009-2010

<sup>10</sup> Ref. nos. 202-203 Voting List 1939-1940

<sup>11</sup> From an old Tewks girl! Christine Romeo

<sup>12</sup> Paul Skingsley

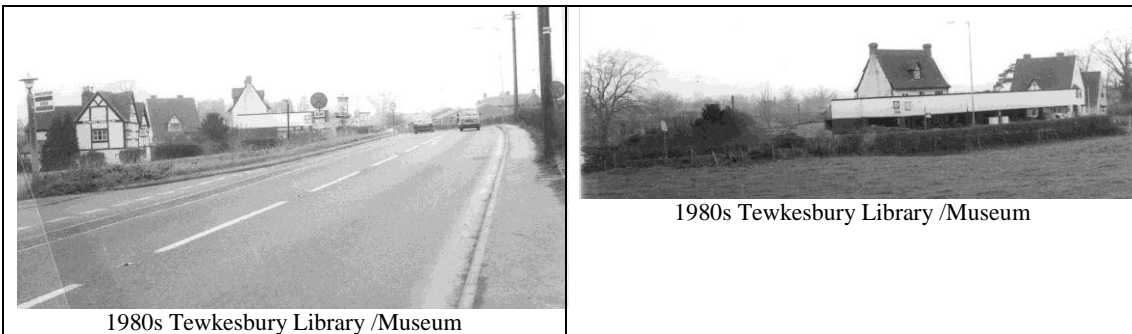
<sup>13</sup> Len Fletcher, Front of House at the Roses: Paul told him the origin of the name.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Biggs 07904516273

but he moved down to the Tewkesbury car mart site. Glynn Evans was a manager there for Wycliffe and agrees with Dilys Aberdeen that "he is still about".<sup>15</sup>

With reference to the ODTAA garage, Ed continued that "I worked there as a mechanic from 1973 to 1982 approx. The garage was taken over by The Wicliffe Motor Co in the middle to the late seventies selling Austin Rover cars."

As far as I remember the garage was owned by two directors of wicliffe motor co independently and managed by Mr Glyn Evans. The two directors got into finance problems owing Wycliffe money, hence the takeover. Dilys Aberdeen confirms that Edgar Glyn Evans, last "owned" the ODTAA garage: "I only knew about him through his being a customer at the Bank: he was a bald man and we called him Glyn Evans."<sup>16</sup> Glyn Evans left the company and Bill Crook taking over as manager until a Wycliffe employee from Gloucester was appointed as manager."<sup>17</sup>



Ed Jones, with a very precise memory, also blames Wycliffe Motors for the canopy: "The photos you have are from the last days of the garage when it was spoilt by the big canopy added by Wycliffe Motors who I think bought from Mr Watson's estate. The ground floor of the original building consisted of the forecourt, an office and shop. The managers had a flat above. The ground sloped away from the road so the building was raised on piers and there was a lower level where there was a workshop, toilets and another bit which I think came as part of the flat. Access to this area was via some very steep concrete steps or a ramp at the Copperfield end which enabled cars to be taken down to the workshop and a hard standing area to be washed and leathered I am pretty sure there were petrol pumps before 1955. There was a verandah to the front of the building at first floor level which had painted boards showing distances to major cities. I think the later canopy misleads you into thinking there is a separate house."

Mr Watson added prefabricated lock-up garages at the rear of the building in the garden area.

Margaret Gittins worked in the office during 1974-5 and her son Colin worked the pumps as a part-time job. The manager would not let her park her Fiat 500 on the forecourt for fear of spoiling its image. However, when she helped sell a car, she was rewarded with vouchers to spend at Cavendish House.

The garage was then sold to the **Warners Motors Group** who then sold the site for the current housing estate.<sup>18</sup> "I would reckon by then it wasn't viable as a service station,

<sup>15</sup> Ed. Jones

<sup>16</sup> Dilys Aberdeen: I left there in Feb 1971 and by the time I returned in 1989, he had gone !!!! But he must still be around somewhere, he didn't look like an old man. He might have been the manager.

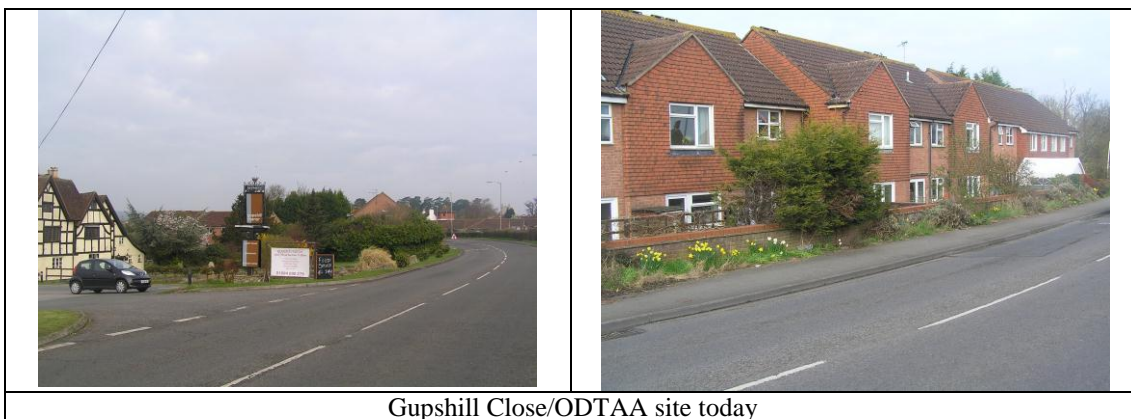
<sup>17</sup> ?

<sup>18</sup> Brian Roles.

the fuel tanks were small and probably not up to safety standards and as a used car lot it wasn't big enough."

Mike Warner himself contacted me and confirmed that Vic Watson sold the garage to Wycliff and that, two years after buying the garage himself; he recalled that he developed the site for housing "about 25 years ago".<sup>19</sup>

There was comment in The Echo about the poor visibility when the houses were built, "*I think the council's response was that there would be fewer vehicle movements from the houses than there were with the garage*".<sup>20</sup>



Gupshill Close/ODTAA site today

It should be the Mayor who is accorded the last word! Geoff Pope recalls that, before and after the Second World War, "*Dad worked on a farm. Whenever we had a drink at Gubshill Manor, he would tell me of the cow-sheds he worked in which are now very much the dance hall and bars open to the public today. I was taken to the ODTAA Garage quite often; dad knew the owner who was often in some kind of distress and named his garage ~ 'One Damn Thing After Another', relating to his personal problems! I hasten to add, for many years and even in Council, I refer to these initials often, at one time they were on a plaque on my desk in the Barbican London!*"<sup>21</sup>

John is so grateful for so many phone calls and emails -  
please email John on [johnhistory@o2.co.uk](mailto:johnhistory@o2.co.uk) if there are any errors  
or if you wish to add anything.  
The only disappointment is that no more photographs have shown up!

<sup>19</sup> Mike Warner by telephone

<sup>20</sup> Ed Jones is the brother of **Mrs Jean McNiven** who also possesses an encyclopaedic memory for people who lived in the Alleys. She contributed a great deal to *Doddo Defiled* in 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Geoff Pope, Mayor