

## CYCLE SALES AND REPAIRS

### Bicycles in Toft

The first bicycle in Toft was probably the one bought by Mr Barton in 1914 from the ‘rag and bone man’ for 10 shillings. Bicycles became commonplace in Toft from the 20’s to the 60’s, as they were an affordable and practical means of local transport. In the 1950’s a few people cycled to work in Cambridge and some men rode to Hardwick to work at Chivers’ Farms. Children who had to cycle more than 2 miles to school were provided with a free bike. The Comberton butcher and the postman used bicycles for deliveries in Toft. From 1951-1963, Geoff Balcombe and Paul Collett delivered goods by bike from Toft shop.

### Local cycle businesses

Several Cambridge cycle businesses set up at the turn of the century are still trading. From 1895 onwards John Albert Townsend produced custom-made bicycles for wealthier members of Cambridge University and Townsend’s Cycles still produce the ‘Light Blue’ bike. Ben Hayward opened his first cycle shop in Cambridge in 1914. From the 1930’s onwards these shops catered for the needs of commuting cyclists and students who lived in the town. However, it appears that many villages also had their own bicycle ‘shops’: certainly Weightman’s garage in Grantchester and Brown’s in Comberton repaired and sold bikes, as well as dealing with cars. Cliff Tebbit still has a Raleigh roadster, on display here, which was bought from Brown’s in around 1935.

## Bicycle businesses in Toft

Any Toft-based cycle businesses must have been have been ‘unofficial’ in that none appears in any issues of Kelly’s Trade Directory for Cambridgeshire.

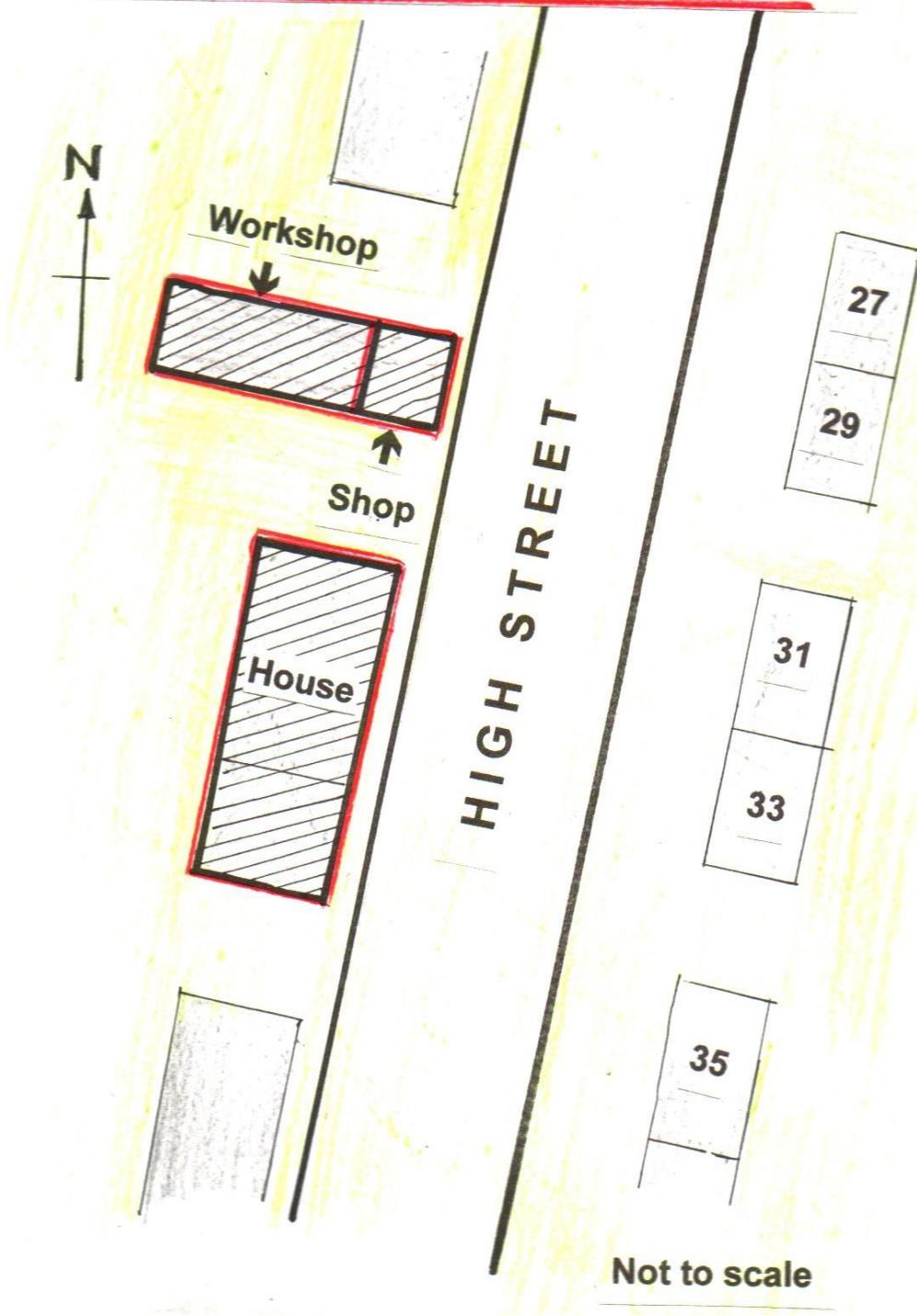
The most well-known supplier and repairer of bikes in Toft was ‘Jack’ Jakins. Tony Pym-Hember repaired bicycles after Jack Jakins had retired.

### E. J. Jakins, Toft Cycle Works (c.1940s)



‘Jack’ Jakins operated in the village from the mid 1930’s until around 1958. He owned a large thatched property on the High Street.

### Approximate location of 'Toft Cycle Works'



Jack assembled and sold proprietary bikes such as the 'Raleigh' and obviously a great deal of his trade was in repairing people's bikes. Terry Osborne relates that, in the 1950's: "*The boys would race round the lanes in the village ... I broke the spokes in a wheel with another boy's pedal ... and went to Mr Jakins to mend it without my mother knowing. He took out a 10 shilling note and said throw the bike in the bomb hole up at the drift ... but started to laugh ... and then he mended it!*"

## **Location**

'Jack' Jakins and his family occupied a thatched house and other buildings on the site of the current 'Potton' houses, nos. 34 and 40 High Street, which were built in 1982.

The business premises were in a converted thatched barn adjacent to the house, at 90° to the road. This was in two halves. The small 'shop' part fronted on to the pavement and had a large window. The large workshop was at the rear of the shop, behind a partition, on which a stag's head was mounted.

## **Hire Purchase**

Hire purchase of bikes was common, as shown by this 1934 Raleigh advert, and may have been subsidised by the manufacturers. It was available in Toft, though this could well have been a Jakins initiative!

Koran Collett bought a new Triumph 'Jack of Clubs' bike from Jakins in 1955 at 10 /- (50p) a week, apparently for a year.

In 1955 Terry Osborne also bought a brand-new green Raleigh roadster at 10/- (50p) per week, but over only 18 weeks.

In 1956 Geoff Balcombe's father bought him a Raleigh 'Trent Tourist' from Jakins under a similar arrangement. (see picture)

## **Other activities at the cycle works!**

Jakins mended and sharpened mowers, and sold paraffin, sweets, crisps, cigarettes and 'pop' (fizzy lemonade). (Yvonne Balcombe remembers taking her ration book there to buy sweets) He may also have mended motorcycles. In addition, ran his own 'Club':

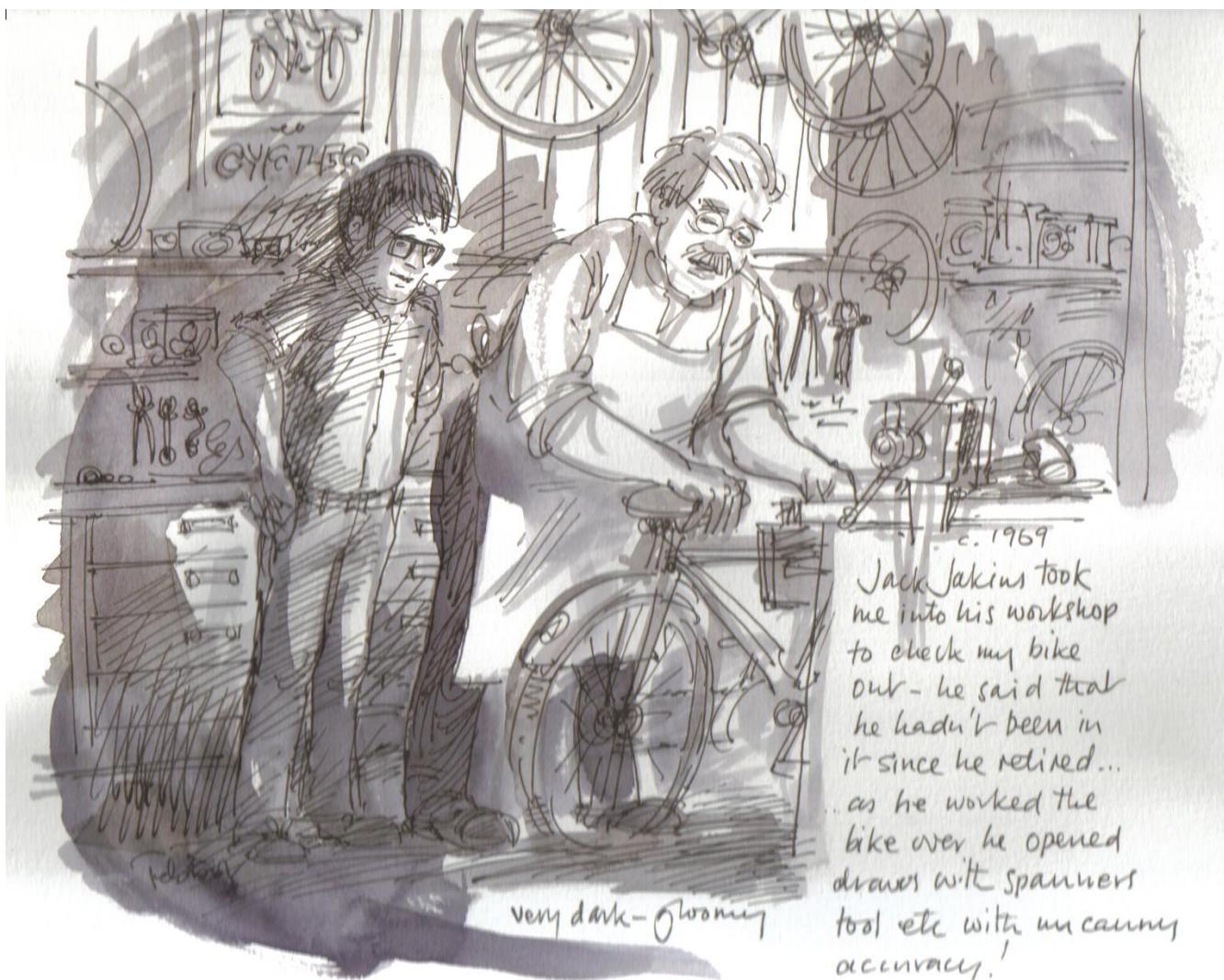
*"Before WW2- what did people do in the evenings? There was a pub, but most people didn't have money to spare. There was the Bike Shop, run by Jack Jakins: the lads of the village could spend the evening entertained by Jack and buy fags, sweets and soft drinks. It was very popular"*

(Ken Tebbit, 1999)



### Jakins in the Home Guard, WWII

Apparently, in the 1950's, Jakins also 'held court' every Sunday morning in his workshop. Young men came from Comberton, Eversden and Kingston to listen to his wartime stories. Jack was therefore well-known in the area and his clientele for bike repairs would have included people from these villages.



Jake Tebbit's recollections of Jakins' shop

## **Jack Jakins –the ‘character’**

Reuben Edward J. Jakins was born in Islington in 1892 and was possibly apprenticed to a bicycle maker in east London. In the First World War he was an RSM or Colour Sergeant. He moved to Toft in around 1934. During WW2 he was the sergeant in the Toft Home Guard. He was a man of principle and very right wing!

*“In the late 1930’s there was a meeting in the bike shop, when it was decided to start a fund to get our own Hall. Jack Jakins was the Treasurer. Arthur (Toby) Morlin was another leading light. Many years later (1959) the school closed. The cash book was produced- inscribed across the front was ‘Toft People’s Hall’. Jakins told the meeting that the cash had been raised for the ‘People’s Hall’ and he would only hand it over for that purpose.”* (Ken Tebbit, 1999)

## **The End of an Era**

Jake Tebbit took his bike to be mended, as a favour, in 1969, when Mr Jakins had been retired for about 10 years.(see Jake’s illustration) It therefore appears that the business ran until around 1958 or ’59.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> 1973 a fire destroyed the house and workshop (See cutting and pictures from the Cambridge Evening News). Jack Jakins was then 81 years old. It was also reported that *‘the workshop contained a motor cycle and mower, as well as various tools’*



Toft villagers watch as firemen tackle the blaze.



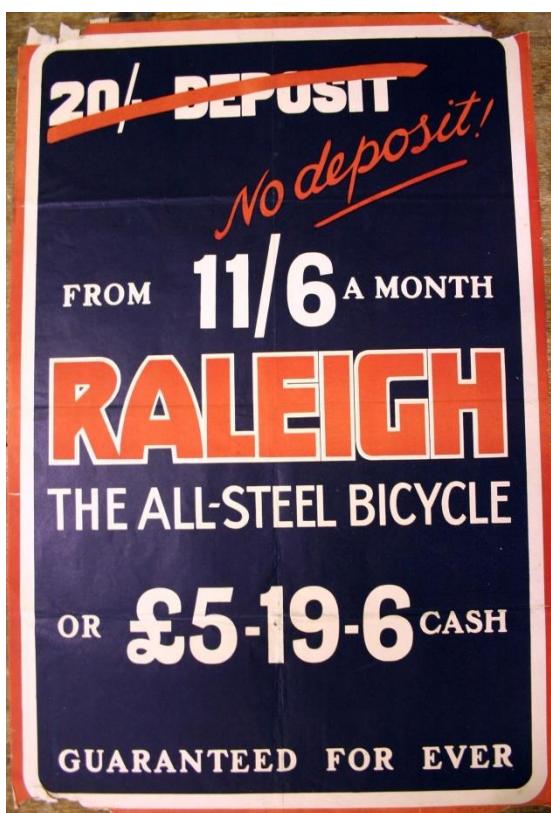
Mr. and Mrs. Jakins then moved to St Andrew's Cottages. Mrs. Jakins died soon after this. Jack Jakins became a resident in Home Meadow and died there in 1983 or '84 at the age of 91 or 92.

## Tony Pym Hember

Tony Pym Hember was an ex racing cyclist who had been badly injured. He lived at 5, Beldam's Close, which was not built until the 60's. The property had a large workshop in which he repaired cycles. Ann Mitchell recollects taking her children's bikes there to be mended in the late 70's and early 80's.



Muriel Peach (Toft native, 1915-2012) in the High St, 1930s



Hire purchase poster



Geoff Balcombe on his Raleigh 'Trent Tourist' in 1959 or '60.  
The bike was purchased from Jakins a few years earlier



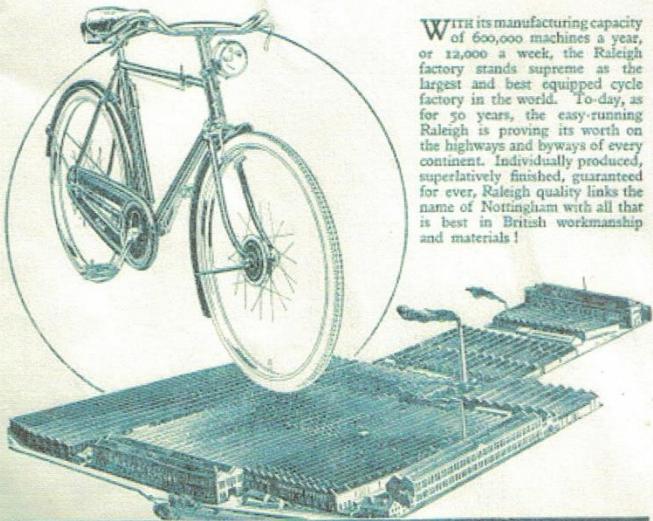
Mr Clifford Tebbit's bicycle

Cliff Tebbit's Raleigh was bought from Brown's of Comberton in the 1930's and is still in use today. It is equipped with 28 inch wheels, rod operated brakes and a Sturmey Archer 3 speed hub gear.

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where Nottingham leads!*

# RALEIGH

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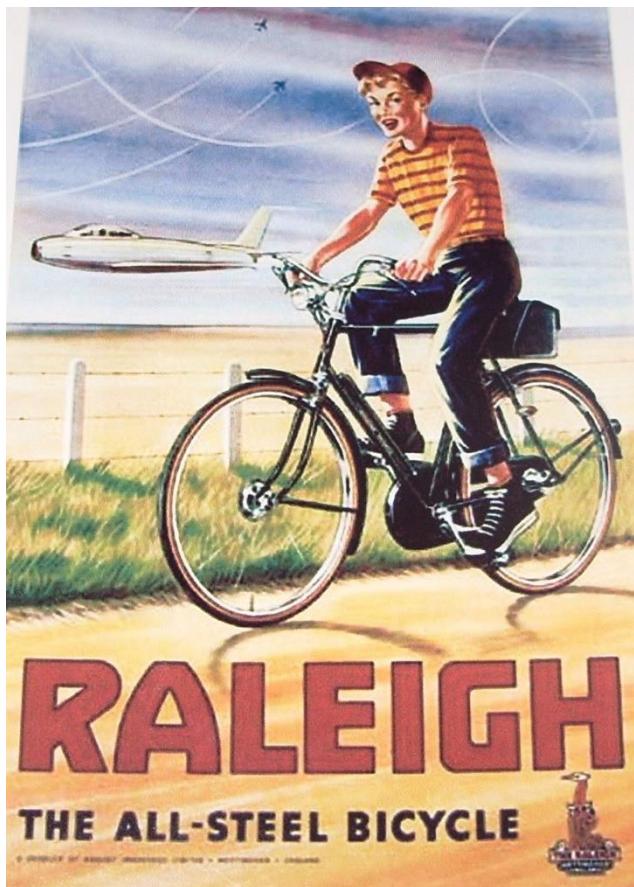
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1940 poster



1950s poster

# Old folk flee blazing cottage at Toft

Three elderly people were homeless yesterday after fire swept through the thatched roof of their cottage in High Street, Toft. A thatched workshop seven yards from the cottage was completely destroyed, and it is thought that sparks from the building started the blaze in the roof of the cottage.

Gale force winds fanned the blaze in both buildings and firemen who arrived on the scene met with a suffocating pall of smoke. One fireman was overcome by fumes and had to be helped to safety by companions.

The owner of the workshop and cottage, 81-year-old Mr. Jack Jakins, had just left the workshop when the alarm was raised.

Neighbours knocked on the cottage door part of which is rented by Mrs. Harriet Webster, aged 64. Mrs. Webster and Mr. Rose Jakins, aged 80, were led from the house and were being cared for by neighbours.

At the height of the blaze, Mr. Jakins tried to help firemen as they fought the flames but he was restrained. The workshop contained a motor cycle and a mower as well as various tools.

## Shocked

As firemen gained control of the outbreak it became clear that the wooden workshop was beyond salvage. Damage to the cottage was largely confined to the first floor.