

## George Tunnell's Dairy by Richard Ede

For a period of over forty years, George Tunnell supplied the people of Westcott with their daily milk and many older residents still remember him as an important figure in the village.



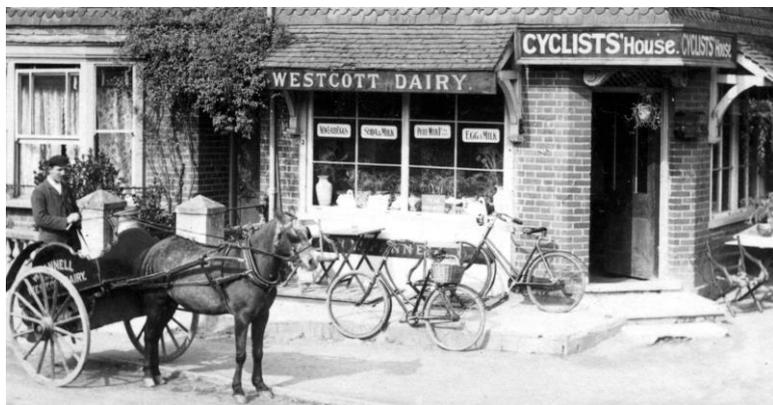
**The Tunnell Family outside Westcott Dairy in 1917**

George Arthur Garner Tunnell was born on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1887 in Kingston Road, Leatherhead, the third child of Charles and Selina Tunnell. In about 1890 the Tunnells moved to Portsmouth Road, Artington, just south of Guildford and when George was still young the family moved a very short distance to Littleton Village. George went to school in Guildford until the age of 12 after which his father moved the family to Coombe Cottages, Westcott, where Charles worked in the brickyard at White Down in the summer months and as a woodsman during the winter months.

George first became involved with farming and dairying when the family moved to Upper Merriden near Coldharbour in 1903 where Charles farmed for a few years.

At the age of 21, George started to build up a business selling milk by bicycle around Westcott and the local villages. He moved to Furlong Road where he met and married Ellen Mabel Mansell (known as Mabel) in St. John's Chapel in 1914.

George worked hard and his milk business was sufficiently successful to allow him to buy the Westcott Dairy, on the corner of North Street by The Green, from William Pannell (pictured right in 1914 with his pony and trap) around the same time as he was married. George was assisted in the business by his wife, his sister Dorothy and his brother Albert. In 1916,

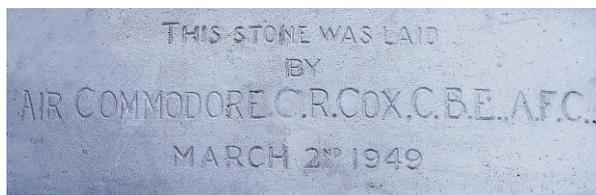


**George Tunnell RFC**

George was called up to serve in the armed forces during the First World War and enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps. With both George and Albert away in the forces, Mabel and Dorothy ran the dairy in spite of the birth of George's first daughter, Mabel, in 1916.

From 1926 until 1951, George initially rented land at Park Farm where he built up a herd of Jersey and Guernsey cows and he moved there with his family in 1938.

In the Second World War, George served as a corporal in the local Home Guard. During the 1920s George had built a cooling and bottling facility at Chapel Lane in Westcott and when the dairy was rebuilt in 1949, George invited an old comrade from his days in the Royal Flying Corps, Claude Cox, by now an Air Commodore, to lay the foundation stone.



In 1951, George sold the business, both the shop by the Green and the processing and bottling plant, to a Mr Vacher, who then traded as Westcott Dairies Limited. He eventually sold on to Home Counties Dairies (later Unigate). George did not give up the dairy business completely. At that time, only cows that had never been exposed to TB were allowed to deliver unpasteurised milk to the public. This was known as T.T. milk (Tuberculin Tested) and George bought Logmore Farm and attempted to build up a T.T. milk business for those who appreciated fresh unpasteurised milk. But he began to suffer from poor health and had to close his business activities.

George was a lifelong teetotaler and non-smoker and the only relaxation he allowed himself was to sing in the choir of Holy Trinity at Westcott which he attended for many years.

George died on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1956. At his funeral the service was conducted by Rev. R. Gregory and the Westcott Choral Society accompanied by Miss Horne performed *Lead Kindly Light*. George left five daughters and 16 grandchildren, several of whom have remained in the Westcott area.



**George Tunnell outside the Westcott Dairy in 1924**

George Tunnell successfully developed the Westcott Dairy despite considerable competition. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were over a dozen farms in and around Westcott and at one time there were at least six dairymen trying to make a living by buying milk from these farms and supplying householders from cans by means of measures, often making their rounds twice a day. The competition was such that in April 1923 J Lloyd was claiming in the local paper that he was supplying milk direct to customers within a few minutes of it being drawn.

After the Second World War, in 1947, there were only two dairymen left, George Tunnell, and Spencer Broyd at Hill Farm. Broyd had come to Westcott in 1925 from United Dairies at Walton-on-Thames, though born in Abinger Hammer. He first started bottling (by hand) in 1932, when it was still considered unnecessary by other local dairymen. When pasteurisation became compulsory he took his milk to Reigate to be treated whereas George Tunnel, as we have seen, built his own pasteurisation and bottling plant in Chapel Lane.

After George sold his business, in 1951 to Mr. Vacher, Spencer Broyd continued as an independent milk supplier for a while but in 1958 he decided to join the opposition and he became the part-time retail manager

for Westcott Dairies Limited. At that time it was the company's proud boast that all milk processed at Westcott Dairies was produced within six miles of Westcott, and the quality was such that there was a market for some of the cream in London.

In more recent times the original Dairy Shop became the Westcott Bakery but has now reverted to its original role as a private house. George Tunnell's bottling plant closed down in 1994 and the site is currently being redeveloped to provide 6 houses and 13 flats with access from The Burrell



**Sources:**

Notes written by George's brother Jack in 1956 and information provided by George's grand-daughters, the late Sandra Harding of Canada and Dyllis Robertshaw of Westcott. Census returns and indexes of births and marriages, with additional material from the Westcott Women's Institute Village Survey 1962.