

Cottis & Sons

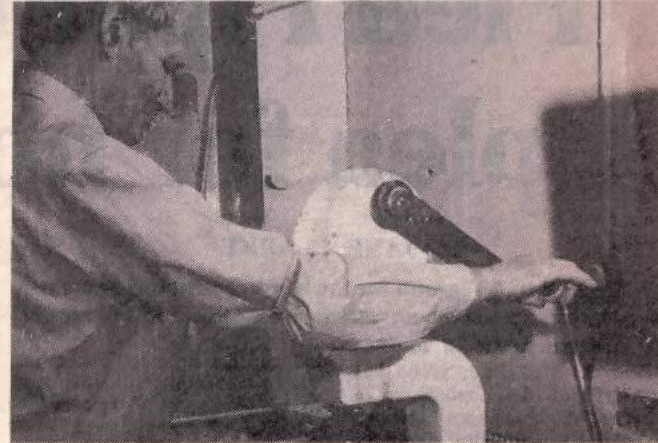
Billericay Model Bakery

A Scrapbook

by

Gillian Giles





Proving their value — a family tradition

by SIMON BRIDGE

HAVE YOU ever wondered how a doughnut is filled with jam? Billericay bakers Cottis and Sons have been perfecting the art for 81 years.

A visit to the High Street shop is a treat for shoppers, often more used to trudging around supermarkets looking at endless rows of shelves.

And a tour behind the scenes with veteran baker Raymond Cottis is an experience not to be missed. Downstairs, bread, rolls and buns are made alongside each other.

"I think we can claim to have the best jam doughnuts in the district," remarked Mr Cottis as he pushed two doughnuts onto a hand pump and injected them with the delightful red mixture, solving the mystery for ever.

Mr Cottis has been in charge

of the shop since the mid-sixties, and times have changed since 1900 when his grandfather William Cottis moved his business from Canewdon.

The firm has been in the family ever since. Behind the scenes it has been transformed into a modern bakery, but with all the individualism it had in the early days.

But in the past there were the odd days when trade came second — when Billericay's fire brigade received an urgent call for help.

"My father and some of my uncles belonged to the fire brigade," explained Mr Cottis.

"And when they were called out, the horses used to pull the firm's delivery van were untethered and had to haul the fire engine through the streets."

Now shoppers are thankful that the shopfront has changed little since those days, but that more up-to-date machinery has been installed to make the products even better.

"I can remember the days when the dough was mixed by hand and all the machines were run on petrol or gas," said Mr Cottis.

"Then at the weekends we had to muck out the stables. Now I don't feel sorry that those days are behind me.

"Bread is a very specialised subject," he added. "Baking different types of loaves with different grades of what is like breeding race horses."

Among her impressive creations are the Polystyrene dummies, made specially for display in the shop windows.

Mr Cottis was brought up in Laindon, where he worked in the family's other shop, which is now closed.

There was never any doubt that he would carry on in the trade.

But now he is preparing to retire and the future of the business is unsure.

"I don't have a family," he said. "And there are no plans laid down for anyone to take over the shop."

But he can assure his customers that the shop will carry on for the time being — and that must be good news for everyone in Billericay.



But Mr Cottis feels the baking trade has been ruined over the past years by big business, and many of the old hands working for him agree.

Frank Halls has been in the trade since 1952 and has not been happy in any other job.

"People coming into the business don't seem to realise that a piece of dough is a living thing," he said. "It lives on fresh air and can't be treated like a piece of metal."

Mr Halls still takes the finished loaves out of the oven with a baker's peel — an instrument which has been used for as long as he can remember.

And upstairs Sue Sheed ices the cakes ordered for weddings and birthday parties.

"Baking different types of loaves with different grades of wheat is like breeding racehorses."

Pictures, working clockwise from the top left-hand corner show: One of the bakers mixing the dough which later will become a fresh-baked loaf. The shaping machine is where the dough is put in special trays and begins to look like a loaf. Mr Raymond Cottis shows how to put the jam in jam tarts. After 40 minutes in the oven the loaves are baked and Frank Halls uses a baker's peel to take them out. Mr Cottis and Sue Sheed proudly display their iced cakes — but which one is the shop-window dummy? A mystery revealed — Mr Cottis shows how they put the jam in doughnuts.





The long queue . . . Billericay bread-buyers make a "B"-line for the High Street's bread shops.

Bread panic as strike hits hard

BILLERICAY housewives are playing hunt the loaf this week after High Street bakers have been left without their bread and butter after an all-out strike by bakery workers.

Queues several hundred yards long formed outside all of the town's bread shops when news of the strike broke last week.

And the panic began as housewives made a B-line for the bakers' stocks — as early as 7.30 a.m.

Now, as the strike — by the Bakery, Food Allied Workers' Union — enters its seventh day many shops have stopped selling bread.

And it's only "one-man" Billericay baker, Cottis and Sons that's managing to keep up with the demand.

Many Billericay housewives are combing the supermarkets and shops for their own flour, yeast and bread tins to bake their own daily loaves.

And one chemist reported selling wine yeast to customers, which is also suitable for making bread.

The strike — which started

nationally last Saturday — has hit many bakery chains badly.

The bakery workers are making a stand against payment for work over bank holidays. And they are asking other unions to cut flour supplies to small bakers which bake their own bread.

This week a spokesman for the High Street's Clarks bakery said that they were substituting cream crackers and dry biscuits in place of bread.

"We are managing, but have no bread or rolls to sell. We are open for coffee and tea, but as far as the bakery is concerned, we are closed.

"Biscuits and crackers with fillings are being sold here — as well as cakes, sold in packets.

"We were very busy on Thursday morning; that was our last day with bread. On Friday, we had to put a notice in the window, 'sorry, no bread,'" said a spokesman.

And it's the same at the High Street's Barton bakers.

On Friday, staff were completely sold out within a few minutes, and all this week they have been closed

for bread.

Mr. Raymond Cottis of the High Street's home-made bakery is hopeful that the strike will end.

But he is making sure his shop produces enough daily bread to cope with the buying fever while it lasts.

"Obviously, it's good business for us, but very hard work, too," he said this week.

"On some days the queue has stretched for dozens of yards — past six or seven shops at least. We are fairly well organised here and the bread supply is usually quite reasonable until mid-morning when I have to take some over to my other shop in Basildon.

"My one big hope is that the strike will end so that we can get back to normal working. We are working normal hours but just a bit harder."

Mr. Cottis is confident his flour supply will not run short yet.

"We get our flour from county millers, in Chelmsford and Maldon, and they are less likely to get picketed than the main suppliers," he added.

HIGH STREET BAKERS

FORCED TO CLOSE

ONE of Billericay's oldest family firms is being forced to close with the loss of 30 jobs.

High Street baker Cottis and Sons, which has been trading in the town since 1900, will shut for good in October.

Veteran baker Mr Raymond Cottis, who has run the business for 20 years, has been told that the property's London owners have decided to bulldoze the bakery area for car parking space.

Mercantile and General Reinsurance Company wants to develop the top floor of the building into offices.

But hopes that Cottis and Sons could be saved were cruelly dashed when Basildon Council rejected Mercantile and General's original plans because of a lack of car parking space.

Now the London firm has decided to go ahead with its refurbishment plans, leaving Cottis without a home.

"It is very disappointing," said Mr Cottis. "We had thought we would be able to continue."

The company's 30 staff, who work in the bakery and the shop at 84 High Street, will lose their jobs, said Mr Cottis.

Mr Cottis was considering

Report by SIMON BRIDGE

retirement from the job he had devoted his life to, but there were plans for someone else to take over his job.

"There was uncertainty about what was to happen when the lease ran out this year," he said. "But there were one or two people who would have been interested in taking charge."

A spokesman for Mercantile and General said: "Our first planning application for the property was turned down because there was not enough parking space."

"Our original intention was to work around Mr Cottis so that he could remain there, but because of the council's car parking requirements this was not possible."

"It is a pity that we are having to demolish part of the bakery to make space for parking."

The spokesman said that no new tenant had been found for the property, but the company had been approached by another bakery firm.

A spokesman for Basildon Council told the Gazette: "We



● Mr Raymond Cottis who has run the business for 20 years.

did oppose the first planning application because it did not meet our requirements.

"But it is up to the company to decide what they do with their property."

Mr Cottis' father William moved the business to Billericay 84 years ago from its original base in Canewdon.

The firm has been in the family ever since and although machinery has been

modernised some traditional baking techniques and equipment are still being used.

The bakery's popular bread and cakes are sold in the front shop, and a sandwich counter is open every lunchtime.

Bakers closes

A BAKERY which has been trading in Billericay since 1900 closes its doors for good tomorrow (Saturday).

Part of Cottis and Sons High Street bakery is to be bulldozed to make way for a car park.

The Mercantile and General Reinsurance Company, the property's London owners, wants to develop the top floor of the building into offices, the Gazette revealed earlier this year.

The London firm decided to demolish part of the building to make way for more car parking spaces required by council regulations.

That left Cottis and Sons without a home, and meant that the bakery's 30 staff would lose their jobs.

Veteran baker Mr Raymond Cottis, who has run the family business for 20 years, has decided to retire.

His father William moved the business to Billericay 84 years ago from its original base in Canewdon.

THE BREAD CART



NOT quiet as old as it looks . . . the early 50s probably? It reminds us of how bread and cakes used to be delivered — by horse and cart.

This was taken in the once picturesque Langdon Hills High Road, in the days when the planners were dreaming up new landscapes for us. Laindoners in those days relied on their daily bread from a Mr J. G. Cottis, who had a shop in the High Street, near Laindon Station, and later in Billericay High Street.

One of Billericay's oldest firms, High Street baker, Cottis and Sons, was forced to close with the loss of 30 jobs.

Billericay's jobless were promised a special boost with the opening of a new computer-linked "Jobsearch" scheme at the town's library.



OCTOBER: Staff line up for a last photograph at Cottis bakers in Billericay High Street which closed



Staff at Cottis bakery say farewell to their customers. From left, they are Mrs Peggy Beckett, Mrs Pat Gibbons, manager Mr William Moore, Miss Gillian Giles, Miss Sue Tynan, and Miss Joanna Green.

End of an era for High Street

EIGHTY-FOUR years of trading ended on Saturday when Billericay bakery Cottis and Sons closed its doors for the last time.

Part of the firm's High

Street premises is to be bulldozed to make way for a car park.

Staff at the shop, which has been run by the Cottis family since the beginning of the

century, said farewell to customers on Saturday.

The decision to close the bakery means 30 staff have lost their jobs.

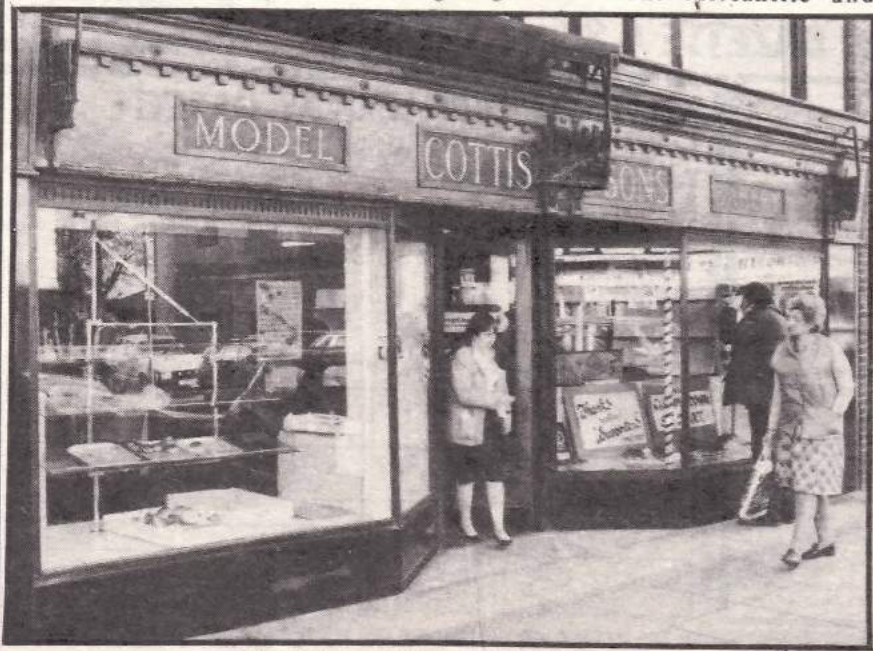
The Mercantile and

General Reinsurance Company, the property's London owners, wants to develop the top floor of the building for offices.

The London firm decided to demolish part of the building to make way for more car parking spaces, to comply with Basildon Council building regulations.

The decision left Cottis and Sons without a home, and veteran baker Mr Raymond Cottis, who has run the business for 20 years, decided to retire.

His father William moved the business to Billericay in 1900 from its original base in Canewdon.



The last day at Cottis and Sons bakery.



Staff at Cotts bakery say farewell to their customers. From left, they are Mrs Peggy Beckett, Mrs Pat Gibbons, manager Mr William Moore, Miss Gillian Giles, Miss Sue Tynan, and Miss Joanna Green.

EIGHTY-FOUR years of trading ended on Saturday when Billericay bakery Cotts and Sons closed its doors for the last time.

Part of the firm's High Street premises is to be bulldozed to make way for a car park.

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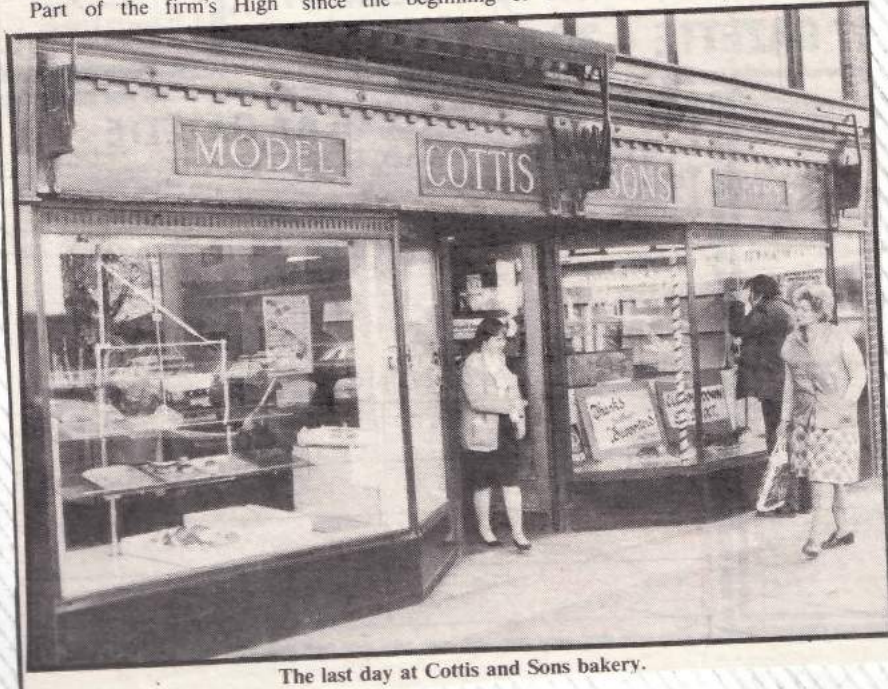
The Mercantile and

Bakery shuts for car park

A BILLERICAY bakery owned by the Cotts family since 1900 is closing on Saturday to make way for a car park.

Mr Raymond Cotts, 73, of Laindon Road, Billericay, has been involved in the High Street bakers about 25 years and said they were moving out reluctantly, even though their lease had run out.

Property behind the Cotts' premises will be converted into a car park.



The last day at Cotts and Sons bakery.

detached dwellings; 84 High Street, Billericay, rear extension and change of use of first floor to offices; The Phone Booth, r/o 92 High Street, Billericay, change of use office to shop; 22 Norsey Road, Billericay, new crossover and hardstanding; Malletts Fruit Farm, London Road, Billericay, vehicle

Cakes give way to more cars

A BILLERICAY bakery, owned by the Cotts family since 1900, is closing on Saturday (20) to make way for car parking spaces.

Mr Raymond Cotts, 73, of Laindon Road, Billericay, has been involved in the High Street bakers for about 25 years and is moving out reluctantly, even though his lease has run out.

The property at the rear of Cotts' premises will be re-developed and converted into a car park.

As one door closes . . .

BAKER, Mr Edward Brannan, is moving his family business to Billericay after scoring a big success down under.

Scottish-born Mr Brannan returned from Australia in September and chose Billericay as the place to re-launch his bakery business — Ed the Bred.

Along with his wife and two sons, Mr Brannan moved into the Christine and the Gift Shop premises in the High Street this week.

Christine's owner Mrs Gene Turner closed down her shop last week after 16 years

in the town.

Mr Brannan will set about refurbishing the shop and plans to open his bakery within four weeks.

"I think Billericay is a beautiful town, and I love the High Street," said Mr Brannan, who lives near Maldon.

Mr Brannan hopes to take on about four full- and part-time staff, and wants eventually to turn half the shop into a coffee lounge.

The shop will be selling traditionally-baked bread and rolls, cakes, pies and many Scottish products, said Mr Brannan, who has been a baker for 20 years.

"I think Billericay needs another bakery, especially after the closure of Cottis and Sons last year," he added.

"We only hope the new shop will attract the same response from shoppers as our three shops in Australia did."

Demolition work has begun on the former Cottis bakery in the High Street.

The bakery firm was forced to close in October after 84 years in the town. The property's London owners decided to bulldoze the shop to make way for car parking space.

Mercantile and General Reinsurance Company is to redevelop the building into a shop with office space upstairs.

A spokesman for Mercantile and General said the work was expected to be completed in July, but it was not known who would move into the premises.



Demolition work at the former Cottis bakery.

Shopping for tenant

REFURBISHMENT of Billericay's former Cottis bakery is due to be finished by the end of the month — but no new tenant has been found for the shop.

The bakery closed a year ago after 84 years in the town when the firm's lease ran out on the property at 84 High Street.

Property owner Mercantile and General Reinsurance has been redeveloping the top floor of the property for offices.

"We have had one or two names put to us as prospective tenants," said a spokesman for Mercantile and General. "But we have not made any agreement."

SPECIAL TRIBUTE 53 YEARS ON



Pictured is Billericay High Street's former Cottis Bakery building, as it was in about 1928. The picture was sent in by Gazette reader Mr Grant McKenzie.

Memory rises as bakery crumbles

THE recent demolition of part of Billericay's Cottis Bakery proved a poignant moment for pensioner Mr Grant McKenzie.

For the familiar shop front, half-timber work and dormer windows, was the work of his father in 1928.

CHANGES

Mr McKenzie, of Lion

Lane, has lived in Billericay for 73 years, and has seen the town change drastically during that period.

"I also note that the large bakery at the rear of Cottis, which my father

built in approximately 1923, has also been demolished," Mr McKenzie told the Gazette.

LIBRARY

"I wonder how many residents in Billericay remember the shop as it was prior to about 1928," he said.

Mr McKenzie said his father had also worked on a new shop front at a building at 97 High Street, which until 1950 was the town's library.

"The building was later demolished and the present building, the offices of the Abbey National Building Society, was erected," he said.