

The Red Wheels plaque, now adorning the wall of the Co-op

Red plaque pays to historic motor

AN HISTORIC Farnham business was the recipient of a prestigious plaque last weekend – honouring its contribution to the automotive industry (and The Queen’s own fleet of cars) over six decades.

Abbott’s of Farnham was selected to be recognised with the Red Wheel heritage plaque, awarded by The Transport Trust – a national charity which dedicates themselves to conserving, preserving and restoring Britain’s unique transport age.

The plaque was unveiled at The Co-operative store, on the Grovelling Estate, Wrecclesham, which is the former site of the Abbott’s of Farnham factory.

A large crowd gathered for the official unveiling of the plaque, which took place at 2pm on Sunday, September 15, presided over by daughters of Mr and Mrs Abbott – Reverend Mary Abbott and Mrs Elizabeth Gill.

During the ceremony, a collection of classic cars gathered at The Co-operative, Wrecclesham, where the plaque was unveiled.

These cars were previously bodied, re-bodied and converted by Abbott’s of Farnham. In particular, a Ford and Vauxhall estate cars, which were converted from saloons by Abbott’s of Farnham, are used by Queen Elizabeth II.

Local historian and author of the *Herald’s Peeps into the Past* column was in attendance at the unveiling, and said: “Great occasion at Wrecclesham today as E D Abbott’s many years of car body building were recognised with the award of a Transport Trust Red Wheels plaque.



Len Huff, director of ED Abbott Ltd (centre) with Simon Wilkinson, chair of the Transport Trust, and guests



A busy forecourt, captured sometime between 1936 and 1939



ED Abbott Ltd traded from 1929 until the business closed in 1972



A large crowd gathered for the opening

“Mary Abbott, daughter of Edward Dixon Abbott, founder of the company, unveiled the plaque on the wall of the Co-op store in brilliant sunshine.

“She was surrounded by a representative selection of Abbott bodied cars of various makes and ages, all now lovingly preserved in showroom condition.”

Store manager of The Co-operative Food, Wrecclesham, David Gourlay said: “Since we were first contacted about the plaque, I have learnt so much about the history of

our area and am proud to be part of such a historical site and momentous occasion.

“Our store is part of Southern Co-op which has been an independent co-operative since 1873 so history is something we take an interest in and are proud to showcase other businesses which have made such a difference to the local community.”

Len Huff, director of ED Abbott Limited, said: “Many of the families of the skilled men and the women who supported them still live in the Wrecclesham area.

“This Transport Trust tribute to the memory of a very fine man, his successful and long-lived company, his totally professional workforce – and all on the 90th anniversary of the foundation of his company – will surely be a totally fitting memorial to Edward Dixon Abbott – and his superb

motor-cars.”

Transport Trust chairman Stuart Wilkinson added: “Britain led the field in the development of transport, which facilitated the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the British Empire.

“Red Wheels aim to draw sites to the attention of a far wider and younger audience – who may be inspired to explore their local history or even consider careers in engineering or logistics.”

The Red Wheels aim to highlight sites of major transport developments and serve as an alternative to blue plaques, which are used to mark historically significant people.

To date, 120 Red Wheels have been distributed to historic items and transport developments – including Brooklands Museum, Weybridge, and the Army Balloon School at Farnborough.



An aerial view of the ED Abbott’s premises circa 1956 – now the Grovelling industrial estate



Councillor Paula Dunsmore with Eloise Abbott



ED Abbott’s brief foray into flight: The Flying Flea



Another of the Abbott cars on display

tribute firm



Revd Miss Mary Abbott, daughter of Edward Abbott



Len Huff, director of ED Abbott Limited, addresses the gathered guests



The frontage of the former ED Abbott premises in Wrecclesham, circa 1966



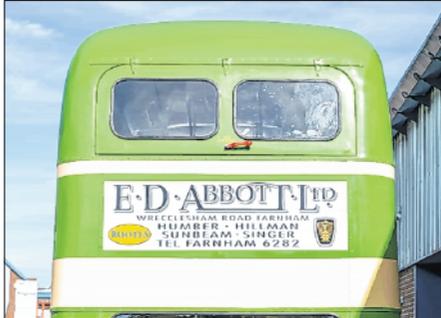
Len Huff, mayor of Farnham Pat Evans and councillor Paula Dunsmore



Mayor of Farnham Pat Evans addresses the crowd



ED Abbott's provided the bodywork for many of the Aldershot & District Traction Company's buses, as seen above



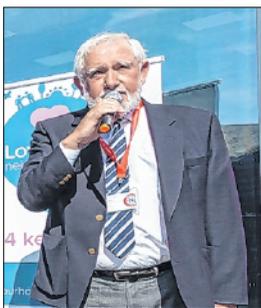
Time for tea?



Unveiling the plaque: Daughters of Edward Abbott, Elizabeth Gill and The Rev Miss Mary Abbott



Mechanics get to work in the ED Abbott's servicing bay, 1956



Stuart Wilkinson, chairman of the Transport Trust



Nigel and Claire Abbott (Abbott's grandson) with Lottie, Eloise and James Abbott (great grandchildren)