

Dedham was a prosperous industrial town in the late middle ages, when the High Street was lined with substantial timber-framed houses and the business premises of affluent clothiers. Two of these buildings later became our surviving pubs (at times called hotels) the Marlborough Head and the Sun Inn.

The Marlborough Head

Looking at the Marlborough from the High Street it is clear from its majestic roof that the pub together with Loom (formerly Cheese, then Church) House formed a single L-shaped building, which had a complex plan made up of at least three units. Writing in 1937 Dedham's historian Canon Rendall describes tenterhooks surviving in the ceiling of a room on the top floor as an indication of the building's connection with the wool trade. He speculates that a long storage chamber ran along the Mill Lane frontage, while the spacious cellars would previously have housed the woad-vats used for dyeing.

There is internal evidence that the upper storey facing Mill Lane was jettied (overhanging). The carved wall plate (horizontal beam) which supported it

was hidden from view when the jetties were later under-built but was partly reinstated in 1922, copying a well-preserved fragment found over the front door. The diagonal "*dragon beam*" in the dining room at the south-west corner suggests that there was also a jetty facing Royal Square. It is believed that this part of the building, which has ceiling beams carved with vine-trails and quatrefoiled cusping, may have been used as a Wool Hall. A diamond-shaped lead ventilator set in an internal window pane is a curious survival to be seen in the same room.

The earliest documentary record of the house dates from 1663, when it was sold as "*a capital messuage called Tastours, with curtilage, garden and orchard*". It seems likely that it had belonged to Oliver Taster who was steward of the nearby Netherhall and Overhall Manor in 1688. A dyer called Edmund Gibson lived there from 1663 to 1686 and an apothecary, Daniel Sherman, used part of it as his shop. Church House was in separate ownership by 1740, when it was bought by a Peruke (wig) maker, Samuel Cutter, who was there until his death in 1771. Its eighteenth century front may date from 1784, when it was described as "*lately rebuilt*". The rest of the building had various occupants until it was turned into an inn.

This must have been in the very early eighteenth century because the new tavern was named after the first Duke of Marlborough, who rose to fame in 1704 after his great victory at Blenheim in the Netherlands during the War of the Spanish Succession. His success made him a popular hero and the church bells were rung in Dedham to celebrate his subsequent taking of Oudenard, Lille, Ghent and Bruges. In 1708 the Churchwardens' Accounts note the expenditure of £1.0.0 *"for ringing at the Victory of Audernard."*

The tavern became an important centre for the social life of the town and those holding meetings held there ranged from the Dedham Society for Brotherly Love (1761-1912), the former pupils of the Writing School at Sherman's (1771) and the True Blue Club (1810). During one of the Annual Fairs in the eighteenth century it is recorded that the landlord of the Marlborough hired the Assembly Hall *"for the publick diversion of dancing for two days."*

The inn had space at the back for a yard and the outbuildings needed for horses, carts and carriages. Its key position at the very centre of the village near the church, the market and the road to the river crossing was ideal for both local and passing trade. In 1768 two London

coaches travelled to Ipswich through Dedham and around 1793 a wagon from Stowmarket to London called at the Marlborough Head once a week. In the twentieth century guests began to arrive in cars and by 1921 they could make use of a *"lock-up motor house"*. The portrait on the inn sign with its wrought-iron frame must have changed many times over the years.

In June 1809 John Constable's mother wrote to him describing a version painted for the pub by his friend, the impecunious East Bergholt artist John Dunthorne (1798-1832): *"Dunthorne took home his noble Duke this day. It is astonishing what a capital Picture he made of it - too good I greatly fear for the gain - compleat armour, truncheon and peruke to boot."*

Photographs taken by the National Monuments Record in 1921 show the walls of the inn plastered and painted with a framed inscription describing it as *"The Leading Hotel for Visitors"*. This vanished soon afterwards when the plaster was stripped off to leave the structural timbers exposed on the upper storey, as reported in the Parish Magazine of September 1922.



A late 19th-century view of Royal Square showing the Marlborough Head Inn on the left with its massive roof shared with Church (now Loom) House next door. Note the bay windows on the house, which were replaced by shop windows in the 1890s but reinstated in the mid twentieth century.



The Marlborough Head in the late nineteenth century with three doors on the Mill Lane frontage. The entrance door at the corner was blocked up in the mid twentieth century.



A pieced-together photograph of the Marlborough (on the left) at the dedication of the war memorial in 1921, showing the shop windows at Church (now Loom) House installed by Henry Gammer c.1894. The sign painted on the wall of the pub reads: THE LEADING HOTEL FOR VISITORS LUNCHEONS, TEAS ETC. PARTIES CATERED FOR LOCK-UP MOTOR HOUSE. The hanging inn sign reads: MARLBOROUGH HEAD HOTEL WINES SPIRITS.



The Marlborough in the 1930s after the plaster had been removed from the upper storey.

The Sun

The Sun Inn was originally an early sixteenth-century house called Wards. When it became an inn in the following century a wing was added to the back, which had a covered outside staircase with a dovecot above it leading to a gallery on two sides of the rear courtyard. Behind that was a meadow which produced enough grass for the inn to supply its own “hayroom”. The east side of the yard was occupied by stables, lofts and barns, which survived until they were demolished in 1932.

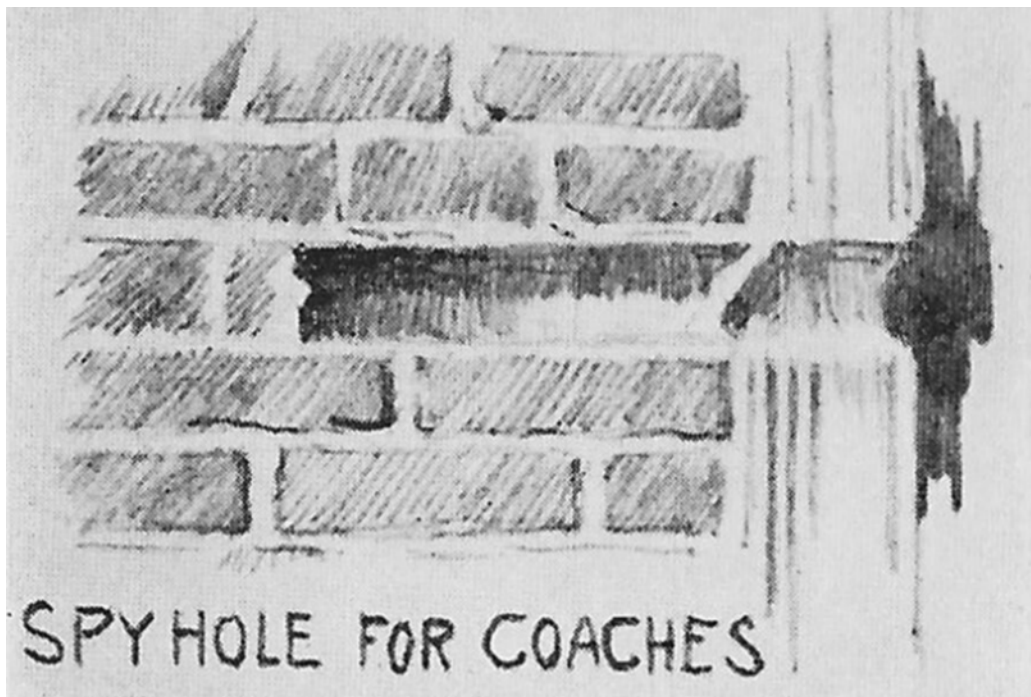
The inn’s name dates only from around 1762 and we do not know why it was chosen. Canon Rendall suggests that it could have been intended to associate the inn with royalty, since the rising sun had been a heraldic charge (emblem) on the coat of arms of both Edward II and Edward IV. As long as I can remember, the pub’s sign has show the *Sun in Splendour* with a human face on one side and on the other Apollo, the Greek sun god, racing his horse-drawn chariot across the sky. The particularly fine wrought-ironwork of its frame has been beautifully restored by the present owner. The Sun was evidently a very prosperous business. An advertisement in the *Ipswich Journal* on 20th March 1766 tells us that at that time it had “good Bed Chambers and lower Rooms, a

good Kitchen, with Bar and proper Conveniences, a Brew-Office, good Cellars and Wine Vaults; stabling for about 50 or 60 horses, Coach and Chaise-Houses; Room for stocking a Quantity of Hay in the same Yard, with an orchard and garden; and on the same Premises, a Malting and a Barber’s Shop, with some rooms belonging”. There was a barber in residence and the small ground-floor room to the east of the carriage archway was a wig as well as a barber’s shop. Ted Eley remembered this being used in the early twentieth century by the Relieving Officer, who came to Dedham to distribute money and loaves of bread to the needy poor.

Like the Marlborough, the Sun was a busy coaching inn. In 1768 two four-horse stage coaches travelled from London to Ipswich via Dedham. In order that grooms could be ready to take charge of the horses the moment they arrived from either direction there were spy holes in the brickwork on either side of the window in the bar parlour, which allowed an oblique view up and down the High Street. These were removed when Cobbolds, the brewers who owned the inn, installed a large up-to-date front window in the early twentieth century. It survived until it fell out of fashion and was replaced by the present sash window in the 1960s.



A photographer outside the Sun Inn in the 1890s. Note the squints on either side of the window to the left of the arch, which allowed grooms waiting in the bar to look out for approaching coaches.



John Foster's sketch of a squint in the bar wall which allowed a view of the coaches as they arrived.

Feature: The Marlborough Head & the Sun Inn

The earlier squints can clearly be seen in a photograph of the front of the building taken in the 1890s and in his Christmas card for 1939, which gives a short history of the pub, Canon Rendall included an explanatory sketch by Dedham artist John Foster.

The Sun was conveniently placed for the large congregation attending sermons at the church during the heyday of the Dedham Lectureship in the seventeenth century, when people travelled from as far away as Ipswich or Cambridge to hear inspiring sermons. It was also in a strategic position for the weekly market held in the centre of the village up to the 1920s, which was remembered long afterwards by the ringing of the Market Bell at 8 o'clock on Tuesday mornings until the 1950s. Numerous societies and organisations held meetings at the inn, which even acted as the Bowlers' Club House and all kinds of convivial occasions took place. In 1843 the *Essex Standard* reported that "*The Invitation Ball at the Sun Inn ... was very well attended, there being about fifty persons of the middle class present ... who vied with each other in infusing hilarity through the company*".

Twentieth-century tourism brought motorists, as evidenced by the AA and RAC signs which appear in photographs of the Sun. Its lofty archway leading into

the yard had been designed to admit the high-hooded wagons and tall loads of earlier times but was not suitable for motor buses. It narrowly escaped destruction in 1937, when visitor numbers were increasing and the owners wanted to demolish it, so that charabancs could drive through into the yard. This caused such an outcry locally that planning permission was refused and the Dedham Vale Society was subsequently set up by concerned residents anxious to guard against future threats to its historic buildings and countryside.

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The covered outside staircase in the Sun yard in 1922. Note the pigeon loft, still in use at that time.



A postcard of The Sun Hotel before 1912, showing (on the right) the large modern bar window installed by Cobbolds at the beginning of the twentieth century.



An early nineteenth-century postcard showing the Sun Inn yard with, on the left, the stables and outbuildings demolished in 1932.