

The Co-op and the Essex Rose

I am greatly indebted to building surveyor Phil Chatfield for information relating to the history of this building during the restoration of the Dedham Co-op shop in 2018 and to the extensive research carried out at that time for the East of England Co-operative by the Colchester Archaeological Trust and architectural historian, Leigh Alston MA (Oxon). I am also very grateful for their recollections to Del and Mandy Bower and Sally Gotelee.

The Co-op and the Essex Rose together occupy a building which was once a prosperous merchant's house dating from c.1520. Its origins were recently clarified when a meticulous restoration of the Co-op took place following a ram raid in December 2017, which caused such major damage to the entire structure that even the roof needed replacement. The shop had to be vacated for a nearly a year, making it possible to carry out a thorough archaeological survey. Finds under the floor of the shop included pottery of all periods from medieval to modern. There were also two prehistoric sherds dating from the Middle Bronze Age to Iron Age, which may have a possible connection to a Bronze Age barrow cemetery which was excavated in 1959 along the Manningtree Road near Lower Barn.

The architectural investigation of the property also covered the Essex Rose Tea Room next door and it emerged

that while the present grocery shop was originally the hall of a large L-shaped Tudor house, the later tea room to its east occupies the site of its former parlour. This part of the building was rebuilt in the mid seventeenth century but the rest of its sixteenth-century jettied rear range, fronting Mill Lane, has survived with its original over-hanging upper storey. The entire building originally had jetties along both its frontages but the others were subsequently under-built. The much later extensions which fill the yard at the back were added before 1875.

The building now occupied by the Co-op shop was originally a single space as it is now, though partitions were inserted at various times by later occupants. Findings during the restoration included traces of a chimney backing on to a cross passage at the western end of the hall, evidence that there was an internal, draught-excluding porch and surviving ceiling beams with roll mouldings of unusually high quality. All these sophisticated features show that this was the house of a high-status member of the community. Its later history shows divided ownership. In the 1838 tithe survey the building which is now the Co-op is described as a house and baker's shop; in White's directory of 1848 the baker was William Fitch. A nineteenth-century brick cellar under the Essex Rose with access to the Co-op suggests a link in the ownership of the two properties after 1830 but in the mid nineteenth century the Essex Rose's building belonged to Samuel Barker



W.H.Smith's shop in the late 19th century; note the simple front window at the corner before its place was taken by the much more elaborate shop window installed by Major Ray c.1900.



W. H. Smith's shop c.1902-3. There appears to be a separate shop to its left . Major Ray's Dedham Bazaar is on the right.

(who in 1862 founded six almshouses in East Lane, which were sold in 1982 to provide the funds for building those in School Lane) and contained the shop of William Booth, a grocer, draper, tallow chandler and insurance agent. An Ordnance Survey map of 1902 appears to show it as the post office.

In 1886 William Henry Smith, recorded in Kelly's Directory of 1912 as a "house furnisher", established his W.H.Smith business where the Co-op is now. The name is just coincidence and has no connection with the present W.H.Smith stationery chain. By 1905 his original small shop had become Smiths Stores, "Complete House Furnishers", with a showy full-height new front. It sold a vast range of goods including furniture, china and glass, household ironmongery, oil lamps, boots and shoes, fancy goods, toys, stationery and patent medicines. The business was bought by the Co-op in 1945 and became a grocery. I remember the grand shopfront which survived until it was replaced by a more modest facade with Georgian-style sash windows in the late 1950s. This was reinstated with practical improvements, including sliding doors, during the restoration in 2018. Dedham now enjoys a very special shopping experience beneath the distinctive Tudor moulded beams, which have been left exposed to view where they have survived in the front part of the ceiling.

The building which is now the front part of the Essex Rose replaced the parlour of the Tudor house. It was constructed

with re-used timber which is now out of sight beneath the plaster but a diagonal "dragon" beam which can be seen on the ceiling at the corner of the ground-floor room facing the High Street shows that it was jettied on both its frontages. From c.1900 until it closed on the outbreak of war in 1939 it was Major Ray's Bazaar, a business founded in 1810, selling domestic ironmongery and a wide range of other merchandise. In the front room on the first floor there is a rare and beautiful seventeenth-century plaster ceiling. I remember sitting underneath it when I started in the kindergarten at Littlegarth in 1944 and we used to go down to the Corner Café, as everyone called it, for our school lunches. By that time the building was the Corner Cottage teasop but I do not know who owned it or did the catering. In 1959 it was bought by Mary Loe who gave it its present name, though she would have chosen to call it the Suffolk Rose if it had not been outside the county. Still living locally, she attended the re-opening of the tea room after its renovation in 2002.

1971 the business was bought from her successor, Mrs Davies by Del and Peggy Bower, who came from Kent where they had already had experience of running a teasop. They ran the Essex Rose with tremendous success for nearly thirty years, at first living in the upstairs rooms with their son David and their daughter Mandy, who helped in the tearoom from a very early age. Del always got up at dawn to do the day's baking and after they moved their home



Smith's Stores postcard showing the new front installed in 1905.



A view of the High Street c.1910, showing the new front put up by Smith's Stores in 1905 with Major Ray's Dedham Bazaar to its right.

to Whitmore Place seven years later, Peggy could be seen every day making her way across the recreation ground to the Essex Rose, always very smartly dressed and accompanied by her pair of Yorkshire terriers, Fortnum and Mason. These endearing little dogs used to sit in the first floor window above the teashop enjoying a bird's eye view of the

comings and goings in the village street. When the Bowers retired in 2000 they were delighted to sell the business to Wilkin and Sons Ltd of Tiptree, who continue to run the teashop on the same traditional lines and have kept the appearance of the building unchanged.

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Detail of the fine seventeenth-century plaster ceiling on first floor above the Essex Rose Tea Room



Postcard showing The Corner Cottage café, probably 1950s