

*I am greatly indebted to Ted's granddaughters, Ann Pearce and Janet Bugg and Ann's husband Mark for much valuable information, the generous loan of their family albums and their kind permission to reproduce the photographs used here.*

## Part 3: Ted and Connie

*My sisters and I grew up in Dedham and when we were away at school in the 1950s we asked Ted (always "Mr Eley" to us in those more formal days) to write to us with the local news; occasionally Connie ("Miss Eley") wrote too. Their letters recount what was going on in the village at the time and Ted would often add some interesting facts about Dedham's past. In this account I have drawn on these letters as well as their verbal reminiscences.*

### Ted Eley (1890-1987)

Ted was ten when his family moved to Dedham and except for a short trip to the Netherlands with the Scouts in 1909 and military service in the Balkans during WWI, he spent his whole life here. The village he knew from childhood was a lively community with a busy social life and a wide variety of shops. The businesses were all run by local families, including London House (now occupied by *Fleur Nails and Beauty* and *Pedicure Foot Clinic*), so called because it claimed to source all its wares direct from London. Ted remembered that as a boy he bought elastic there to use for making a catapult.

When Ted was young a trip to Colchester was a full day's expedition. He described walking or taking the carrier's cart to Ardleigh station in the morning, a train to Colchester's North Station, on foot from there up into the town and then the same again in reverse coming home. However there was no reason to go further afield for daily shopping because everything people needed was brought to the village. Yeast for the bakery, for instance, arrived by carrier or on the horse-drawn bus. There was poverty in the area and the Relieving Officer would come to Dedham with money for families in need; they also qualified for two loaves of bread which the Eleys would bake and hand out to them in the shop. The bakery also carried out special orders for various occasions, such as providing brown bread for the Oyster Feast held by the Dedham Gentlemen's Club which used to meet at the Hewitt Hall (now the Assembly Rooms).

After Robert Baden-Powell founded the Boy Scouts in 1908 Dedham set up its own troop which had about forty members by 1914. Ted joined at the outset and went with them on a camping expedition they made to Holland the following year. He was Scout Master by 1921 when they took part in Beating the Bounds, a formal perambulation of the sixteen-mile length of Dedham's parish boundary. A photograph taken on the opposite river bank shows their corrugated iron bathing shed where the Black Brook joins the Stour. The troop disbanded at

the start of WWII and was never re-formed.

Before WWI Ted had already gained experience at an army training camp at Thetford in 1910-11. His war service was concerned with the logistics of military transport and a photograph dated 1917 shows serried ranks of lorries, tents and workshops in the arid landscape of Macedonia. He wrote to me in 1956 that he had *"spent over two years round in and about Salonika, the Thessalonica of St Paul. We used to travel on the road to Philippolis. The natives still plough with the ox and ass and there are very few trees or flowers. Nor is there a fresh green spring as we have here. I returned home in March and it seemed the very best spring that I ever remember."*

Ted maintained the bakery's various vehicles, an important task in those days when breakdowns were a common occurrence. His father had owned a large tricycle before 1900 and this preceded a family enthusiasm for motor cycles shared by both Connie and Jim. In the 1950s Ted's Bantam motor bike took him for long rides round the district, as far afield as Felixstowe, Harwich, Hadleigh and Kersey, where he would take snapshots for the remarkable photographic record he made of the locality. In one of his letters he wrote about the thrill of visiting Acton Place where his mother's ancestors had lived in 1722.

In 1923 Ted married Dorothy Smith (1874-1970) and their only son Jim (1925-2003) was born two years later.



Ted (left) on war service in Salonika, January 1918



*Ted and Dorothy with Jim c.1930*

They lived in the house in Princel Lane behind the Bakery where the whole family worked, later including Jim's wife Jill (née Ellis, 1933-2002) whom he married in 1957. Ted welcomed children's visits to the bakehouse, sometimes letting them raid his dried fruit tin and once, he told me, when he was busy "*all on his lone*" making 600 bridge rolls, teasing my little sister and her friend by pretending to chase them out with his rolling pin. I remember the delicious smell of new bread as he stood in the pit in front of the oven unloading his loaves with a wooden shovel.

In the procession down the aisle after church services Ted always carried the cross and when he drew level with the pew at the back of the nave where our family habitually sat he would solemnly give my sisters and me an enormous wink!

As soon as he moved to Dedham Ted's father had begun singing in the church

choir and Ted started when he was eight. A photograph taken on Whit Sunday 1934, when Jim joined too, shows three generations of Eleys in the choir together. In 1984 Ted earned a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* as England's longest-serving chorister and, as a brass plate above his seat in the choir stalls records, when he died three years later just before his ninety-eighth birthday he had been singing in our church for eighty-nine years.

### **Connie Eley (1896-1983)**

Apart from her early years when she lived with her aunts during the week so as to go to school in Braintree, Connie Eley spent her whole life in Dedham working in the family bakery and running it in partnership with her brother Ted after their father's retirement in the 1920s. The personal diaries she kept during and after WW2 make very interesting reading, especially when she was writing about the bakery and social events in the village. In 1940 she recorded local air raids, the first Dedham casualty, wartime food shortages and on August 5th "*Last Day allowed to make Iced Cakes other than Chocolate*". Connie's particular expertise was in making the cakes sold in the shop and later she became renowned far afield for her skill in decorative icing. She belonged to numerous organisations in the village including the Girl Guides, the Mothers' Union, The Women's Institute, the Good Neighbours and the Choral Society. Connie was a skilled needlewoman and made some



*Ted in the bakehouse shortly before he retired  
in 1962*

embroideries used in the church. She took classes in pottery, art, dressmaking and upholstery and regularly borrowed books from the library. Belying her mild manner, when she was just over fifty she learned to ride a motor bike and enjoyed scrambling, as well as going on touring holidays in East Anglia with Ted. She was eventually elected a life member of the Essex and Suffolk Border Motorcycle Club.

It was amazing that she was able to fit in so much in spite of her busy days at the bakery, which became even more demanding in the late 1950s when the need to reduce costs meant doing

delivery rounds on top of all her other work. She had to learn intricacies like which door to go to, exactly where customers wanted their bread left and who would get upset if she didn't just walk in. After her father's death in 1941 Connie went to live at Boot's Hole, her newly-built bungalow at the top of Shoebridge Hill. Ted's wife Dorothy died in 1970 and he moved in companionably with Connie, staying on there alone, after she had predeceased him, for the last four years of his life.

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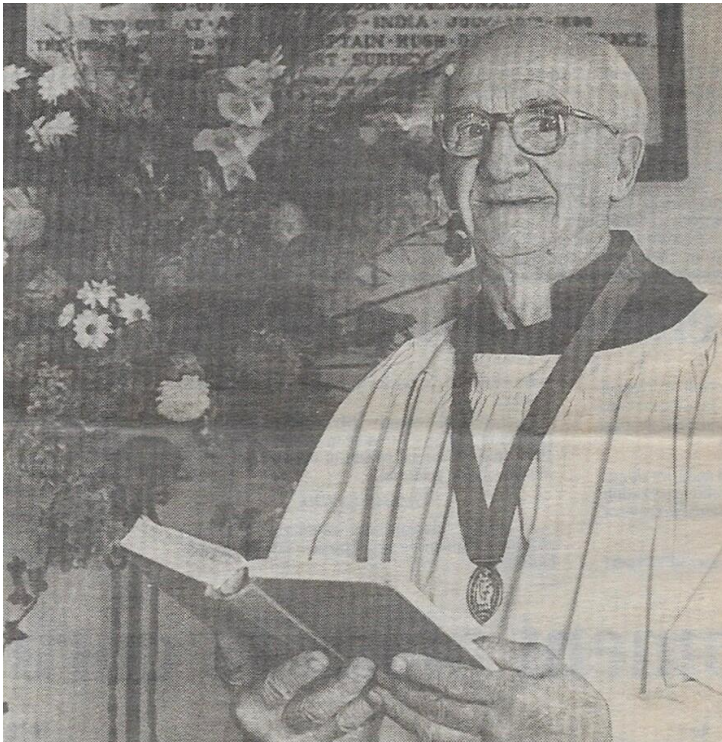




*Ted (back right) with the Dedham Scouts, beating the bounds of the parish in 1922.  
Note the bathing place on the far side of the river.*



*Connie aged 51 or 52 with her first motor bike in the late 1940s*



*Ted Eley celebrating 89 years in the church choir, 1987  
 Connie in the shop with a customer c.1962*







*Jim Eley aged 2 in 1927, already a motor bike enthusiast!*



*Ted (far left) and Jim (far right), c.1950*