

Dedham in 1830 -1835

Excerpts from the Recollections of Elizabeth Wormeley Latimer (1822-1904) written c.1880, which were sent by her son Ralph to the Vicar, Canon Given-Wilson and printed in the Dedham Parish Magazine in November 1911. Elizabeth describes her parents Ralph and Caroline Wormeley and their children “moving to Dedham, a beautiful little village on the borders of Suffolk and Essex, with a magnificent old Church, and excellent society and a great reputation for its county balls”.

“The house I we occupied at Dedham stood in the village street, but was large, old fashioned and very substantial. It had all sorts of queer ups and downs in it, closets in inaccessible places, a beautiful walled garden full of fruit, a large stable and brewery² adjoining. Every family brewed its own beer then. Our house stood next to that of the village doctor³, who indeed was our landlord, and was a very eccentric person. He had a beautiful field, surrounded by a most expensive iron railing, which was opposite our house and almost like a park to it, and in this he kept an old mare and two donkeys he had rescued from ill-usage. The animals never did any work and were devoted to each other.

The society at Dedham was excellent. Perhaps if I were to enumerate some of the persons who composed it, it would

give you an idea of the kind of persons who ... had their homes in and around it. We had four clergymen, three of them doctors of divinity. First, our Vicar, Dr Miller; second, the master of the Dedham Grammar School, Dr Taylor; third, Dr Hurloch, Rector of Langham; fourth, his brother, our Lecturer. Then we had Mr Merry⁴, ex-ambassador to Portugal and to the United States, where his appointment had not been popular, as they expected a more important and titled Englishman. Then there was Mr Mules, Master of the Hounds, and his wife Lady Pilkington⁵, widow of Sir John Pilkington, but according to English custom, having been her ladyship she kept her title. There were many widows and old maids, several naval officers and their families⁶, and many others of no particular interest in this history.

A great many dinner parties were given. Dinner was always at five, but people began to come at half past four. For why? All had phaetons, none closed carriages but Mr Merry, so they had to depend for conveyance on the village post chaise and the village sedan chair. The Clerk was the man, who with an assistant, carried the chair.

After dinner we little folks came in to dessert, then the ladies retired to the drawing room until the gentlemen left their wine and joined them, then they played whist. Dr Miller, who always dressed in black small clothes and black silk stockings and buckles taught me the game.



The front of Great House a hundred years later but essentially unchanged since the Wormeley family lived there.

He was a most dignified pastor, attentive to all his parish duties and preached excellent sermons of the dry and sound kind. His losses at whist he bore himself, but his winnings he always put into the poor box. A very good whist player was the Abbé Couffon. He had emigrated from France early in the Revolution, unwilling to take the oath⁷ required of the clergy. He had settled at Dedham as chaplain to a neighbouring Roman Catholic nobleman, and was the teacher of French to all the country round. I was one of his pupils. The reading book he used for us was called *Les Accidents d'Enfance*; such a collection of misfortunes befalling disobedient and naughty children that it was comical. I can see him now combing with a pocket comb his little yellow wig before he began his lesson. Everybody loved him; no thought of religious differences ever entered the minds of his neighbours in social intercourse.

Dr Hurloch⁸ had in his house a magnificent bedstead, rescued from the wreck of one of the vessels of the Spanish Armada. The bed posts were little boy angels life size, carved and gilded and holding up the canopy. Once a year Mrs Hurloch gave a syllabub party, when we all went to a farm she had at Langham and syllabub was made as the cows were being milked, for syllabub to be syllabub must be just milked from the cow.

In Queen Elizabeth's time it was found there was so little preaching of any account in numbers of parishes

throughout England that funds were raised for establishing in such parishes a Lecturer to preach once a week, and the Vicar of the parish had to permit him to do so. Mr Hurloch⁹ had a Tuesday morning service, when he gave his lecture. The idea originated with the Puritans, who desired that the people should at least have the Gospel, as they called it, once a week.

The great feature of Dedham was its Grammar School, a fine old red brick building, standing in a prominent position in the street, with playing fields adjoining. In it a certain number of boys received free education, but the greater part of the pupils were the sons of gentlemen, who boarded with Dr Taylor, the headmaster. It was an excellent school. My brother¹⁰ went to it, and Dr Taylor was very anxious to prepare him for Cambridge. The great seal of the school is a curiosity: at the top of some high steps sits the headmaster with an immense birch rod in his hand. On the steps kneel three boys in the costume of the days of Edward VI. Whether they are waiting for punishment or saying their lessons we never could determine. The great day of the school was Guy Fawkes Day, the 5th of November. They always had fireworks, and a guy was burned in effigy before the School House in an immense bonfire.

One of the interesting events of my life in Dedham, where I was very happy, for my mother gave me my lessons and I had a beautiful little pony called Gazelle, was the marriage of Miss Maria Daniel,

daughter of Admiral Daniel our neighbour and great friend, to Mr Jennings, a chaplain in India ... in our beautiful parish church. ... In a big round hand I transcribed my name in the parish register as one of the witnesses.

All this time the Reform Bill¹¹ excitement was going on and my father¹² was in the thick of it. All his acquaintances round Dedham were of a different way of thinking, but nothing impaired his friendly relations though he was the most outspoken of men. For several years he was steward of the Dedham Balls¹³. One night some English officers came over from Colchester and one of them was the son of the traitor, Benedict Arnold¹⁴. My father said it gave him a pang to do his duty and find him partners.

My dancing master at Dedham was Mr Novarre, [whose] father¹⁵ arranged all the Opera and Court Ballets, etc [in France]. He taught all over the three counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. He [had] emigrated during the Revolution. An English lady of rank offered, if young Novarre chose, to send him to College and make a clergyman of him. This would have involved a change of faith and he refused, preferring to become a dancing master.

The time came when my father and mother decided to leave Dedham. It was the year after the birth of my youngest sister, Ariana Randolph, who was carried to the church to be

christened in a sedan chair on our nurse's knees. They left Dedham with great regret, and at first thought of settling among the naval society at Southampton, but finally decided on London."

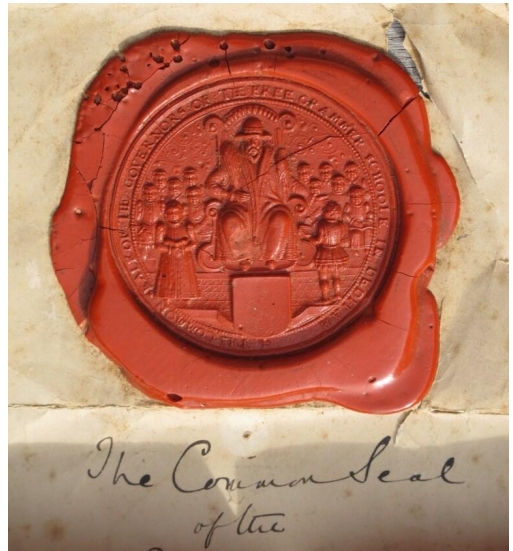
The following account comes from recollections of her father by Elizabeth's younger sister Katharine Prescott Wormeley (1830-1908).

"When he lived in Dedham he used to drive about the country in a four-wheeled chaise, drawn by a stout horse ... [which] became the property of the neighbourhood. Two or three times a week he would drive it to Colchester, loaded with friends who wanted a day's shopping; and on Saturdays he generally took the Vicar to attend the gathering of the clergy which took place on the market-day. If by any chance he found himself alone in this conveyance, he would pick up foot-passengers - "giving them a lift" he used to call it. One summer's day, as he was walking home from Colchester, he overtook a poor old woman of our village who made her living by selling fish, which she fetched herself from the neighbouring town. [She was sobbing because she had hurt her foot and gone lame, so that she and would not be able to deliver the fish for Miss Ward's wedding breakfast in time and would lose all her custom.] 'Cheer up, Mrs Vince', cried father, 'never mind, give me your fish.'... So saying, he shouldered the basket and walked away. ...

He met every fine lady he knew driving into Colchester, and they all stared to see the Captain's load; but he walked briskly along, shifting it now to one shoulder and now to the other, the tail flapping as he walked, till he had ... delivered it safely to Mrs Ward's kitchen door."

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*With thanks for his help to
the Rev. Dr Gerard Moate*



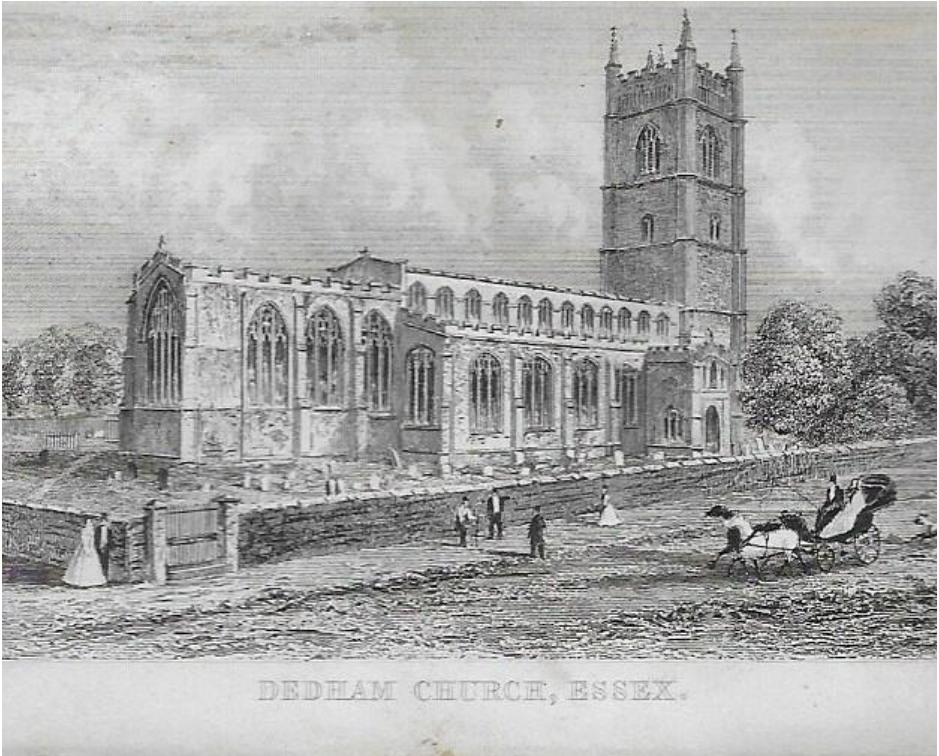
*The great seal of the Grammar School
described by Elizabeth Latimer.*



Great House c.1910, still much as it must have appeared in the Wormeleys' time. Note the substantial earlier wing at right angles to the mid-eighteenth century front of the house. The property included a coach house and stable building fronting the High Street and a brewhouse lying behind it (now Littlegarth house and studio).



The same gate still leads into the field opposite Great House, where the village doctor kept an old mare and two donkeys.



DEDHAM CHURCH, ESSEX.

Dedham Church by William Henry Capone, who engraved his topographical prints between 1832 and 1855.

Footnotes:

¹Great House, not the present building but its predecessor which burned down in 1936.

²Now Littlegarth, a separate property.

³Presumably Westgate House.

⁴Anthony Merry (1756-1835), Britain's Ambassador to the United States in 1803-6 moved here after his wife's death and was remembered locally as "a ceremonious, polite and highly refined old gentleman". There is memorial to him in the north aisle of the church and his Merry hatchment is high up on the east wall of the south porch. From 1824 to '35 he lived with his unmarried sister at Dedham House on the Stratford Road, south-east of Dalethorpe; this house was subsequently demolished and its name transferred to the present Dedham House in the centre of the village.

⁵There is memorial to her in the south aisle of the church.

⁶Elizabeth's father was a naval Captain (later Admiral).

⁷i.e. to swear to uphold the new constitution.

⁸Dr James Thomas Hurlock was Rector of Langham from 1829 to '47.

⁹Mr William Milton Hurlock (1783-1840) the Dedham Lecturer. There is a memorial to him in the church on the east wall of the north aisle.

¹⁰James Preble Wormeley (1826-51).

¹¹Leading to the Reform Act of 1832, changing the British electoral system which had long been criticised as unfair.

¹²who had liberal views.

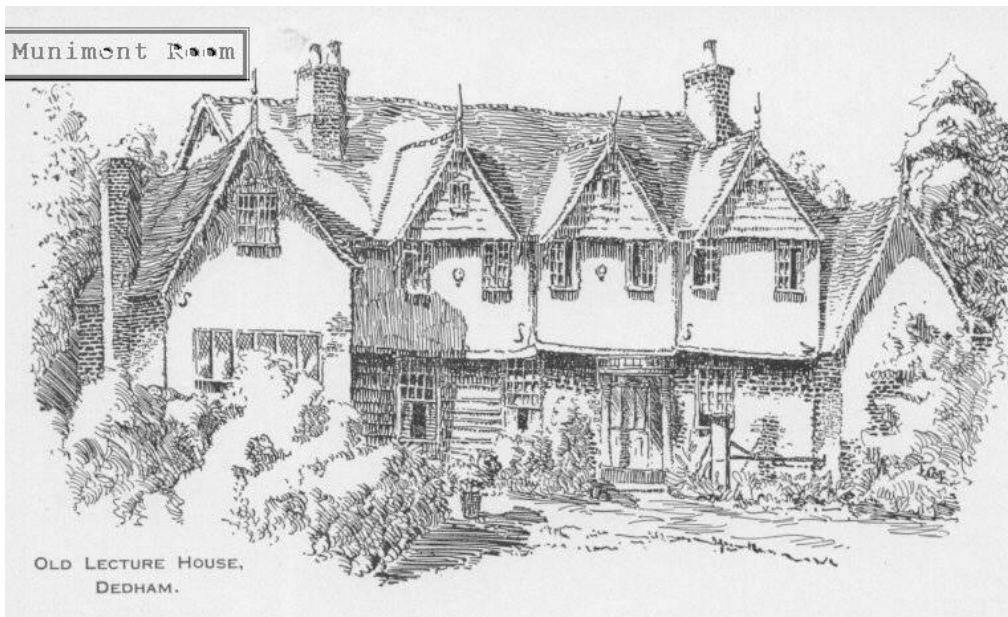
¹³Held in the Assembly Rooms.

¹⁴A distinguished American officer (1741-1801) who defected to the British side in the War of Independence.

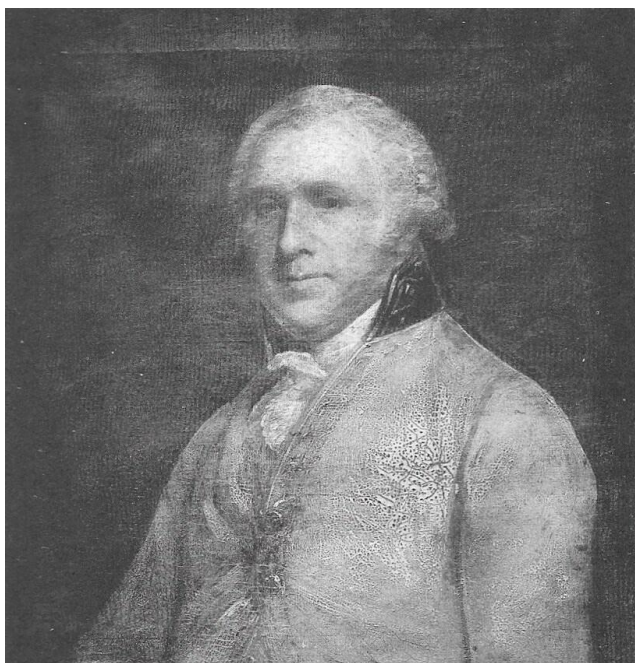
¹⁵Jean-Georges Noverre, French dancer and ballet-master (1727-1810).



Dedham in a drawing by G.B. Capion, illustrated in Thomas Wright's Picturesque Beauties of Great Britain, published in 1832. The Wormeleys' son James Preble was a pupil at the school at this time.



The Lecture House in 1869, reproduced from a watercolour sketch by K.A. Murray, neé Dunnage. This house where the Lecturer William Milton Hurlock lived in the 1830s was demolished in 1872 and replaced by the present Lecture House.



Photograph of a lost portrait of Anthony Merry, painted at Washington by Gilbert Stuart in 1805.