

Dedham Pharmacy

This account is based on research carried out by the late Phyllis Phillips, which she generously made available to me in 2007. For photographs and further information I am indebted to her husband, pharmacist Jack Phillips and to Christine Lowden (née Gooch), whose family owned the Pharmacy until 1962.

We know that there was a pharmacy in Dedham as early as 1869, when George Samuel Manthrop was listed in the first full register published by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain as the “already established” owner of a business in Dedham. He remained here until 1876, when he moved to Stoke Newington, London. In 1875 the chemist in Dedham was Charles John Kirkham, who was succeeded by William Hobbs Gooch in 1881. Surviving bill-heads from his dispensary dated 188_ show that as well as drugs he sold bibles and porter in casks, while psalters had been advertised at an earlier period. His business included the pharmacies in both Dedham and East Bergholt.



Gooch's Chemist in Royal Square in the late 1940s

The Gooch family owned the chemist's shop at Churchgate House in Royal Square for more than eighty years as well as the adjacent Duchy House, which was built to replace an existing cottage. The old cottage had been fronted to the north facing the square but the new house faced east, which allowed the Drift footpath to be widened to take vehicular traffic. This gave access to Duchy Cottage which they also owned.



William Rastrick Gooch (second from left) with staff and relatives outside his shop, c.1946

One of William Hobbs Gooch's three sons, William Rastrick Gooch, who had gone into partnership with his father, succeeded him on his death in 1913. He continued the business with his wife Ann who was a nurse. In the winter the shop was heated by an open coal fire. The wall behind the counter was still covered by rows of small wooden drawers labelled in gold with the names of the ingredients which were used for making up prescriptions before the advent of proprietary medicines. Behind the shop was the dispensary

where Mr Gooch still mixed some of his own prescriptions such as skin creams. By the time he died in 1950 he had sold the business in East Bergholt. His widow retrained as a chiropodist and kept the Dedham shop going for a further twelve years with the help of locums and managers.



Phyllis and Jack Phillips outside the Pharmacy in the early 1970s

In 1962 the business was bought by Fred Harvey who ran it with his wife Phyllis for ten years, keeping the shop essentially unchanged. I remember glass-fronted cabinets, the drawers behind the counter and in the window two of the carboys or large glass bottles filled with coloured liquid which are still to be seen in some traditional pharmacies. Medicines sold under their own name included delicious cherry cough mixture with a picture of Dedham church tower on the label. The shop was crammed with an excellent variety of merchandise and space was somehow found for scales for babies and a penny-in-the-slot machine for customers to weigh themselves.

In 1972 the shop was sold to Jack and Phyllis Phillips who ran it as a flourishing business for the next twenty-five years. Since prescriptions were no longer made up from separate ingredients and dispensing had become a matter of selecting and issuing medicines they decided to update the interior and in the 1980s carried out a complete re-fit with smart mahogany furnishings. Then in 1994 they gained much-needed extra space by moving the shop to its present location in the High Street. Here it expanded into the larger premises of the former Spearing's grocery, which was vacant after a short spell as a Martin Hogg's China Shop.

Three years later the Phillipses sold to Jayesh Kotecha, who ran the business for twenty years. He also purchased the Pharmacy in East Bergholt, bringing the two shops back into the same ownership. He subsequently combined the Pharmacy with the Dedham Post Office, which he set up in at the rear of the shop in 2005 when the Hood family's stewardship came to an end. This dual arrangement continued under the ownership of Mandeep and Pardeep Sandhu, who bought the business in 2017 but reluctantly closed the Post Office in 2019. They continue to run the Pharmacy, which remains a friendly, welcoming and greatly-valued shop in the centre of the village, as it has been for so many years.

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14 January 2020