

The Brook Street Corner

Having published two important books on the village in 1937 Dedham's distinguished twentieth-century historian Canon Gerald H. Rendall began to follow them up with detailed discussions of specific buildings, which took the form of illustrated Christmas cards intended "to serve as a memento of scenes fast vanishing from living memories." After only two of these had appeared in 1938 and 1939 they came to an end, probably because of wartime paper shortage, and since he died in 1945 they were never resumed. To add pictorial interest to his research Canon Rendall asked the painter John Foster who lived at Muniment House to provide the illustrations and one of these shows "Cottages in Old Brook Street" accompanying the melancholy message: "May Christmas 1939 be the blessed harbinger of a Happier New Year".

The four or five cottages in question included the three shown in the picture, which are copied from an old photograph. They lay between the present row of Brook Cottages and Muniment House and two more were round the corner out of sight facing the cart track to Dedham Hall Farm. They were all demolished in 1903 by Ebenezer Clover of Dedham Hall, allowing him to divert the drive to his house away from the farmyard. Dedham Hall has been identified as the subsidiary Dedham Manor of Overhall and Netherhall, consisting of the half share of the Norman Dedham Manor given by Sir John de Stuteville to the Nuns of

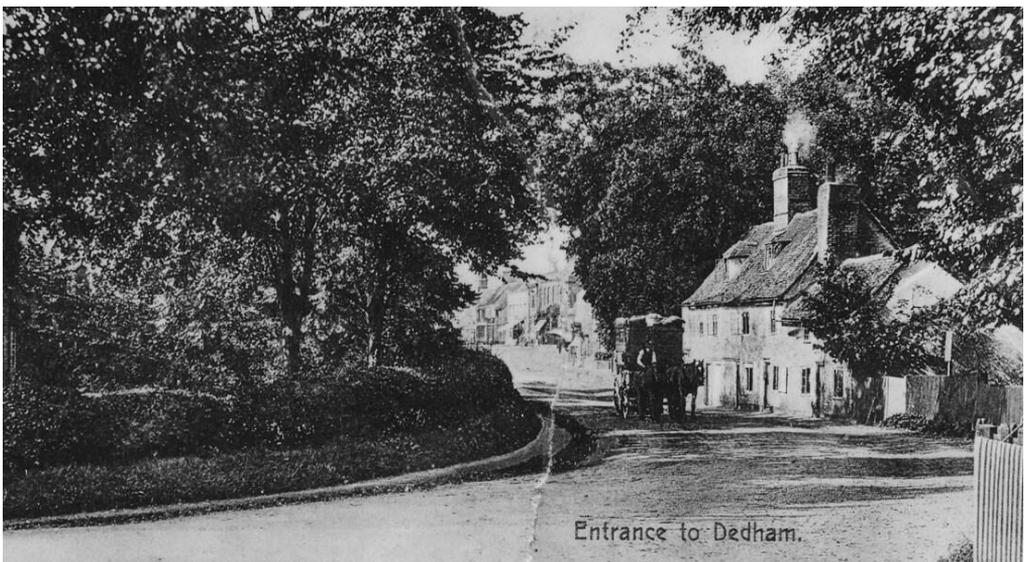
Campsey Ash in 1240. Its Demesne included a thatched hall, three barns, three dovecotes and fishponds which were still in use in the eighteenth century; one of them adjoining "Conifers Slade" (see below) was referred to in a Rental Document of 1748 as "the Nether Pond" and like the present pond reinstated c.1980 was located in the banked meadow between the Dedham Hall drive and Brook Street.

Canon Rendall writes that the most interesting of the lost cottages was the shop with bottle-glass window panes nearest to Muniment House. He suggests that its position makes it a lineal descendant of the Cheese House recorded in 1414-15 "at the gate of the manor"... "where the products of the Hall farm were purveyed to the townsfolk". It is not to be confused, he explains, with Cheese House (now Loom House) next to the Marlborough which belonged to the primary Dedham Manor on the site of Royal Square and would have traded in competition with it. He writes that at the shop in John Foster's picture "the Hunnaballs did a thriving fish trade, supplemented by sweets and small sundries". He notes that the name Hunnaball appears with various different spellings in the register of births and deaths in the parish. The people shown on the doorstep in John Foster's picture are members of the family of the fishmonger James Hunnaball and his wife Julia. One of them is their daughter Elizabeth Julia, later wife of William Ephraim Cottee. Canon Rendall says that it was she (he mistakenly calls her Emma) who lent the photograph which



Cottages and shops next to Muniment House which were demolished in 1903. This view by the artist John Foster was copied from a photograph borrowed from Mrs Elizabeth Julia Cottee, née Hunnaball who is shown in the group standing in the doorway

The corner of Brook Street showing Brook Cottages, the row of four cottages described in early manor rolls as Conifer Stead. Note the fence which marks the site of the row of vanished cottages and shops between them and Muniment House.



John Foster copied. After this cottage was demolished the Hunnaballs moved their fish shop and their home westwards along the High Street to the corner of the lane between the Old Exchange and Littlegarth, where James was followed by his son Percy who also sold ice cream. The family continued to own land behind Muniment House which was the former Archery Piece, where the pupils at the Grammar School used to do their shooting practice. When George Stiff and his wife and daughter lived at Muniment House in the 1970s he had a plot where he grew his vegetables on "Archers Meadow."

The other shop shown on the left in the picture, which had a rounded bow window, was rented by the Sharps. Their family were still living close by in the later twentieth century in a cottage attached to the eastern end of the main block of Brook Cottages, which was a late sixteenth-century structure whose roof had been raised in the mid seventeenth century to increase living space. It provided four dwellings, now reduced to three. In early Manor Rolls it was described as "*Conifer Stead*," spelt in a variety of different ways. Canon Rendall takes this name to refer to a vanished conifer plantation but its position tempts one to wonder whether it may alternatively derive from a nearby rabbit (*archaic: cony/coney*) warren, an area of land preserved by the manor for the domestic rearing of rabbits as a source of meat and fur. *Fairstead (Old English faeger - pleasant, stede - place)* is familiar locally as the name of a village near Braintree.

Muniment House dates from the 1700s. Canon Rendall says it was "*popularly known as 'Monument House' because School muniments [title deeds or other documents relating to the ownership of land] were lodged there!*" but I have never heard that name used. John Foster occupied the house for four decades in the mid twentieth century. Born in 1877 at Sculcoates in Yorkshire, where his father was a nurseryman and florist, he was educated in Hull before studying at the Royal College of Art in London. When young he worked in the family business and in 1911 he married Sarah Lillian Mallison (1876-1954).

They moved south to Dedham in the 1920s, both ending their days at Muniment House (which he called "The Corner House") where he died aged ninety in 1968. His pictures were predominantly in oils of flowers or still life subjects but he did landscapes too and also painted in watercolours. His work was exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool and elsewhere.

I remember seeing his wife as an old lady being towed round the village by an extremely strong dachshund which threatened to pull her over! When she died in 1954 John Foster presented one of his paintings to St Mary's Church in her memory. It hung on the west wall of the Vicar's Vestry until it was stolen after Evening Prayer one day in late June 2003. The theft was reported to the Stolen Artwork Register by the Vicar, the Rev. Gerard Moate but sadly the picture has not been recovered.

Limetree House next door was formerly known as The Limes when it was the home of retired farmer Dick Langton and his wife Daphne, who ran it as a guest house for visitors to the village. Daphne Langton was an expert gardener and I used to go and buy lettuces from her, freshly-cut in the back garden.

The street front of the house is unaltered since then except that the window of a former butcher's shop in the adjoining building on the right has now been blocked up. The position of the shop's door on to Brook Street can still be seen where the brickwork has been filled in.

Until the 1960s the only building on Frog Meadow on the other side of Brook Street was the schoolroom,

which was put up in 1868 for the Grammar School only twenty years before it closed down. It was demolished in the late 1960s.

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I am most fortunate to have been able to draw on Canon Rendall's important research on this subject. I am also grateful for their help to Georgina Cottee and Maureen Floyd (née Stiff), who has allowed me to reproduce her photograph of Muniment House in the 1970s. The Rev. Dr Gerard Moate has kindly supplied the photograph of John Foster's painting stolen from the church and information relating to it.

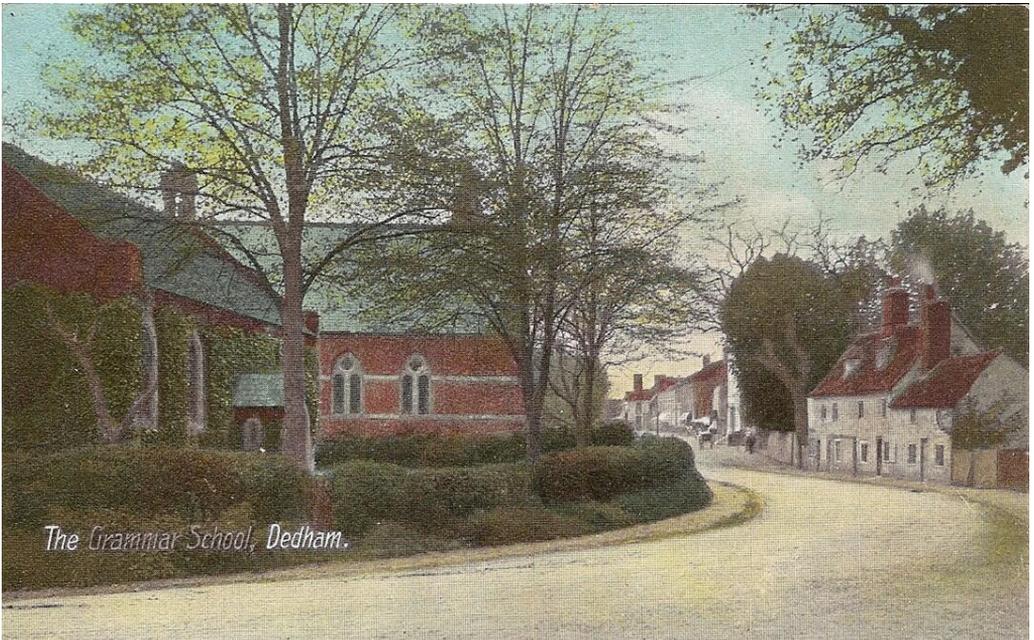


Muniment House and The Limes (now Limetree House) in the 1970s. Notice on the far right the large window of the former butcher's shop.



Patched brickwork at Limetree House in 2021, showing the position of the door into the former butcher's shop.

The Brook Street corner c.1900 showing the schoolroom built for the Grammar School in 1868, the only structure on Frog Meadow until the 1960s. It was demolished in the late 1960s.



The Grammar School, Dedham.



The reinstated manorial fishpond at Dedham Hall in 2021



This painting by John Foster was presented by the artist to St Mary's, Dedham in memory of his wife Sarah Lillian née Mallison (1876-1954). It was stolen from the church in 2003 and has not been recovered.



The painter John Ernest Foster (1877-1968) who lived at Muniment House in the mid twentieth century