

HISTORIC DEDHAM

The Great House Fire

Great House, a late medieval timber-framed building which had been re-fronted with white Suffolk bricks in the mid eighteenth century, burned to the ground in the early hours of 1 December 1936 on the same night as the Crystal Palace fire. The glow in the sky over South London and the flames in the village could both be seen from the top of Shoebridge's Hill.

The fire, which was caused by an electrical fault, claimed no victims. The four occupants, Mr and Mrs J. R. Loe and their two Austrian maids, who were roused by the barking of their pet spaniel, climbed out on to the porch and were rescued by neighbours with ladders. A Dedham shopkeeper, Mr E. C. Ray, up early to meet the 6am mail van, was one of the first to

raise the alarm. By the time the fire brigade was called at 6.15am, the high wind which was fanning the flames had turned the house into an inferno. Two of the fireman had a narrow escape when part of the roof crashed down only moments after they had jumped clear. Jets of water from hydrants were directed on to the blazing mass until the sodden, smouldering wreckage cast a pall of smoke across the village.

Little House to the east, which shared a party wall, was extensively damaged but was not beyond repair. Great House had been completely gutted. The brick façade was still standing after the fire had been put out but it was in such a precarious state that it had to be demolished immediately.



Westgate House and Great House, High Street, 1 Dec 1936

The burnt-out site was bought by Spencer and Elsie Jackson and their son-in-law, the architect Raymond Erith who lived at Dalebrook House, designed the present house in 1937.

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