

Walthamstow High Street: St James to Willow Walk (C 1966 – 1986)

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Ah, the High Street. Main thoroughfare and life blood of Walthamstow!

I can remember shopping with my mum in Woolworths which was right on the St James' street end of the High St. The wooden display counters and the plastic boat shaped affairs that held your pick & mix selection which was duly given to the assistant to be weighed. I still hanker after Jameson's Mr Ruffles Raspberry fondants with their red coconutty middle. They are still available, but they just don't taste quite the same... I also remember the lozenge shaped boiled fruit sweets with the soft fruit centres and the wrapping that was akin to origami, beautifully folded. At Willowfield I made a clay version for the house art competition, even creating a copy of the wrapping. However, seeing as my drawing is as good as my music reading (everything looks like an amoeba), my replication of an orange on the wrapper did not quite hit the mark. But I received a point for the house for my attempt and my mum became the recipient of a great door stop!

Back to Woollies': at the back of the shop next to Shoe Polish, and Laces were the light bulbs – there was a tester attached to the shelving so that you could check that the bulb was good before purchase. Could you imagine what Health & Safety would say about that nowadays – They would have a "pink fit"!

Next to Woollies was the Co-op supermarket. It was affiliated to the LCS (London Co-op Society) and it was my job as a youngster to give the assistant my mum's divi number – 686701. In later years they gave loyalty stamps that you collected in books and then redeemed for goods at their main department store in Hoe Street on the corner of Orford Road.

Burtens was on the corner opposite Woollies' and the Co-op with True Form shoes next to it, directly opposite the Regal Dry Cleaners and Smiths Toy Shop. If I remember correctly there was an optician between the two in St James' street and the row ended with Barclays Bank on the corner of Leucha Road.

However, on the corner of Pretoria Avenue was the co-op chemist. Mr Milward was the pharmacist. He was very good with advice and often could recommend proprietary remedies that saved a visit to the doctor. Ours was Dr Stolar on the corner of Canning Road opposite the Palmerston Post Office. Even when we had a script from the doctor, my mum would always go to Mr Milward at the Co-Op to have it dispensed rather than use Beards in Forest Road.



The Co-op Chemist nowadays.
Mr Milward's domain.

On the left just behind the tree
you can see the Clock House,
built by Warner's and was
subsequently used by the co-op
bakery department.

Clock house now stands on the
corner of Pretoria Avenue and
Mission Grove.

Going up the high street on the left I can remember Cole & Deakins an Aladdin's cave of an ironmongers with all the mops & buckets outside. They also sold Paraffin (Esso Blue & the Pink paraffin man on the advertisements). Further along there was a small gas showroom and the row ended with Fish Brother's jewellers and a furniture shop on the corner of Carisbrook Road.

On the right hand side I can remember the Co-op drapery shop, Percy Ingalls bakery, a butchers, Boots the chemist, Wallis homewares, Stones TV & radio, the luggage shop, the Como cafe and finally Holdstock's bakery on the corner of Courtenay Place. Outside Boots was the banana man's stall. My mum always gave her patronage to him primarily as his stock was always good and he had a disabled son who helped serve on the stall if the weather was fine.

From Carisbrook Road on the right was John Collier (the window to watch), Marks & Spencer, Bellman's wools, Bata shoes, D.E.R TV rentals, Rosins bakers, with I think a gentleman's outfitter on the corner of Buxton Road. Outside M&S was the button man. A double pitch that was always good for zips, buttons, thread and the necessities for home sewing.

On the Right hand side on the corner of Courtenay Place was the cheap toiletry shop with the Engraving stall outside. Monty Modlyn from Thames News made an appearance there once and my mum came home with a signed photo which I have recently found. Next to that was Bach the grocers. That shop always had a "whiff" about it and was never patronised by my mum.

Next along the line was Sainsbury. I remember the installation of the change machines at the tills. That caused a bit of consternation with the older ladies who stood holding their hand out to the cashier when the change was in the cup at the end of the till. My mom could do a week's shopping with a 10 bob note and still get change (that's 50P nowadays).

Next to Sainsbury was the Offal Shop where my mum would purchase Ox-tail, Kidneys and the like. I refused to go into the shop as I hated the smell and the sawdust on the floor so would wait outside with the shopping bag on wheels. (This kid was born veggie but lapsed in much later years).

Outside the offal shop was a tree – I think it was the only remaining tree in the High Street until the site re-development in the 1980's removed it. I think the reason was Health & Safety. Well to be fair, it tended to lean at an angle a bit like Pisa's tower, but it had been like that for donkey's years and had withstood many a harsh blast of wind down the High Street. It would probably still be there if it hadn't been swiftly removed all in the name of development !

Next to the dreaded offal shop was Rossi's ice cream parlour and following on was Claire's the fishmonger with all the fish & shellfish beautifully laid out on ice. I think a fabric shop was next to that or was it a stall and was it called H&R fabrics? Wonder of the fabric came home "fishy"? Anyhow, outside Sainsbury's was "Grubbs" greengrocery stalls (potatoes, onions & Brussels tops also known as "greens") and a record stall selling 45, long players and 8 track cassettes.

The next shop I remember was British Home Stores. They had their own brand goods called "Prova". They also had a fabulous hat counter that my mum would plump me against complete with the shopping bag on wheels, whilst she performed her search for a bargain. I used to have a field day trying on all the hats and I never wandered away – too engrossed in large brim, small brim, "ascot" jobs and what they nowadays call "fascinators". There is nothing fascinating about them, but the feathers do tend to tickle! When BHS moved out – Argos moved in. Chris Hill's dad had the fruit stall outside Argos and a few pitches away were a toiletry/cleaning fluid stall and a small electrical, radio & batteries stall. It was true; you could get anything on a stall in the high street.

On the other side starting at Buxton Road was the Cock Tavern, Geary's butchers, a clothing shop then an alley that took you to the back of the Dominion. Next in the line were Dolcis shoes, The ABC bakers, Lockey's handbags (I remember purchasing a Fuchsia Pink suede affair from there in around 1974), and further along the row were a newspaper shop and a wallpaper shop ending with a wood yard. Outside the Cock was the salad stall. I was still purchasing my lettuce, radishes, cress and tomatoes from it up until I left Walthamstow in 1991.

I remember "Texas Homebase" coming to Walthamstow. It was opposite the wood yard and was packed to the gills on opening day. Reckon this was the start of consumerism as it had been heavily advertised on TV and everybody wanted a piece of the action. Decorating had never been so popular.

Next to Texas by a step of a small alleyway was Manze's eel & pie shop. Whilst I would happily munch on pie, mash & liquor, I'm afraid that Jellied Eels were a big no-no. And to see an eel whipped out of a tray and swiftly decapitated & gutted on the stall outside made me bilious (the thought still does). Years later I laughingly accused my mum of "child mental cruelty" as she used to send me down to get a pint of jellied eels for her tea. I would walk home along Palmerston road holding the parcel at arm's length. Thankfully she ate them on her own in the kitchen behind a closed door (with a lot of noisy lip smacking I hasten to add) as my dad and I used to turn green at the thought of them so we banished her to her own enjoyment.



Manze's shop.

Still relatively unchanged after all these years.

The window on the left used to be raised upwards and the jellied or stewed eels' were served from there.

Just a way up from Manze's was Appleton's a large open fronted confectionery and tobacco shop. If I recall they also had another branch further up the High Street opposite Tesco. The next shop I can remember is "Estelle", the ladies foundation garment shop. It was on the corner of the Alley leading to the working men's club. Mrs Dowsett worked in there – she was the mum of one of my school friends Michael. Those garments were a force to be reckoned with and scared a young girl like myself witless. However they did explain why many Walthamstow women looked so upright and firm – poor souls were boned n' pulled to the hilt!

On the other side of the working men's club entrance was a shop that became a Kitchen utensil shop in the mid 1970's. For the life of me I cannot recall what it replaced (it may have been a cobblers shop) but it seemed to stay around until the mid 1980's as I used to purchase utensils from there for my own kitchen.

The shop next door was a ladies fashion shop of quite good quality – the name however escapes me. Outside the shop was Lou's net curtain stall where my friend Karen worked. I was on the denim stall with Irv right next door to them and outside Downtown Cutters. The stall next to me was run by two guys who were affiliated to a shop near to Argos. Their main product was "Willex De-greasable" cleaning fluid. Crikey, the pitch they used to sell the product was amazing. They performed

demonstration after demonstration, wiping grease from old cooker tops, car hub caps, old kettles and the like. Many years later I saw them at the Ideal Home Exhibition where they were selling "Peter Paint Pads". After a quick recognition and a hello I secured a set of the pads at a reduced price and I have to say they were quite good!

On the left hand side of the road opposite Texas and Manze's , just past the wood yard was a branch of Pollards. It was a drapery shop that sold antimacassars, doilies, (you rarely see those nowadays) tea towels, bedding etc..... They also sold some underwear and nightdresses of the "all is safely gathered in" or "Harvest's" variety if you prefer. A few shops along from Pollards were the "Boys of Rathbone Street" which sold greeting cards, party and fancy goods. It was always fab for posters of pop singers like David Essex, Michael Jackson etc. They also had another branch in Rathbone market in Canning Town. The shop was in what was the old Salvation Army citadel and the upper floors of the shop still held the "Salvation " sign in the brickwork. The next I can remember on that particular terrace of shops are a butchers and then Percy Ingalls, right on the corner of Mission Grove.



The Old Salvation Army Citadel
where The Boys of Rathbone
Street card shop used to reside.

Now it's a Nail bar.

Courtesy Google Earth



Percy Ingalls bakers shop on the corner of Mission Grove. You can just see the old school in the background.

Courtesy Google Earth

J Davis's was the beginning of the final terrace of shops on the left leading up to Palmerston Road.

It was quite a high class ladies clothing shop with huge glass doors and an aroma that you just knew you were in a better class of Establishment. It had wonderful glass topped counters that held wooden drawers full of items of hosiery & lingerie. They also sold dresses, coats, handbags, hats. It had quite a wide pavement frontage and at the end of the outside of the shop which generated a wall separating it from the "new" Woolworths. Against the wall was a large collection box for either "Dogs for the Blind" or "The Spastic Society". It was only in later years just before J Davies closed that the collection box had to be chained to the wall to stop theft. Walthamstow was predominantly an honest place.

On the right hand side of the high street, from opposite Mission Grove, I can remember a Radio Rentals where you could rent a TV. Then across an alley way was a shop that became a supermarket called "Cadena". It was one of the first shops that were very continental in layout and it had seating for fresh cakes & coffee, as well as a good stock of mostly European goods – German, Spanish and Italian foods etc. After all this was the early days of the "Common Market" so Walthamstow went "near continental". My mum loved it and used to pop in for foodstuffs that were quite novel in those days. However it didn't last too long and later on I feel that it may have become a Bejam?

Next along the block I can remember "Garnham's" . I can't remember what it sold, but I do remember that it had an access arch through to the rear of the premises. This is where the market stalls would be housed at the end of the day. I can recall the "Abbott" brothers (Andy the younger brother went to Mission Grove School) who pulled the stalls out in the early mornings and stowed them away at the end of trading. Next to Garnham's was a church. It had grounds that reached behind the shops and had a gate for access on Willow Walk. As children we would look through the gate and see some residual graves that were still there even after the church had been demolished. There was a rumour that a "princess" was buried there and if I recall correctly a piece was written by

the Guardian when the site was being cleared for development. Although there were graves on the site, I have a feeling that the "princess" was just an urban myth.

Next to the church was "Steven's florists". It looked like a large adapted greenhouse but its displays were glorious – and the scent of the flowers. Ahhhhhh !

A few shops along was "Wrights Mans Shop" with their advertisement of "Bolenium Bill" bibbed blue denim work wear. Next door to that was "Alf's" record store – always a must on a Saturday. All the top ten chart 45's were held in pigeon hole type boxed shelves behind the counter so you knew just by looking if your favourite record had sold out. I can remember a ladies clothing shop right on the corner of Willow Walk, but I can't remember what the shop contained beforehand so if anyone can enlighten me I'd be really grateful.

To be continued: Willow Walk to Hoe St.