

Walthamstow High Street: Willow Walk and up to the top (C 1966 – 1986)

By Sally Passmore

"Whatever you want, you'll find it in Walthamstow market"

Looking up the "High street" from the junction of Palmerston Rd and Willow Walk, Sainsbury now occupy site between Willow Walk & Linden Road. However, before the supermarket was relocated to the site, there used to be a cafe on the corner of the road, called the "Sunrise". It backed on to an old school building that housed the Children's Library on the ground floor and Marsh Street Youth Club on the upper floor. It was opposite the "dolls hospital" where a few of my dolls had to receive some attention over the years. I believe the doll's hospital was demolished in the 1980's to help with the widening of the Palmerston Road junction with the High St.

Next to the Dolls Hospital was another branch of Wrights Man's Shop. As this shop was taller than the dolls hospital, it had an advertisement for "Bolenium Bill" denim work overalls (Bib & Brace) painted on the side of the shop. Next to Wrights was "Tandy" a haven for amateur radio and "Hi Fi" enthusiasts. If I remember correctly, the brand name they used for batteries etc was "Radio Shack".

A few shops along were a ladies outfitters ("Doreen"?), a Northern Rock Building society, a butchers and the "Army & Navy". This particular establishment was akin to a rag & bone shop. It dealt with Military style clothing; quite possibly from WWII and was a dark & dingy shop. However, many of my male school friends found some gems (flying jackets etc) in there that were proudly worn to Marsh Street Youth Club on disco nights. The Army & Navy was opposite the Linden Road junction with the Library/Youth Club on one corner and Fish Bros jewellers on the other. Just inside Linden Road was Fish Bros pawnbrokers: a small establishment behind the main shop where you could either put goods in for cash or purchase the "Un-redeemed Pledges".

On the other side of the road just a few shops up from the Army & Navy was Henry Taylor the school uniform shop. As now, a school uniform was expensive so the variety of stalls in the High Street allowed for skirts & blouses in the school colours. However, Henry Taylor was de-rigueur for PE tops (aertex), PE Skirts and school ties. At the end of the terrace of shops on the corner of Storey Road was the SMS stores a fore-runner of Superdrug. Across from the SMS stores was a stall that sold wallpaper – it was true, you could get anything on a stall in the market.

Opposite Storey Rd was a ladies clothes shop called "Janet's". It was a double shop which was housed in premises that were originally a Fire Station. Looking at Google Earth you can still see the arched upper windows of the fire station. Alas the rest of the building is quite unrecognisable.



Janet's: A double fronted ladies clothes shop that was originally a fire station. Alas now a Kebab House. The arched brickwork on the upper windows are phenomenal.

Courtesy of Google Earth

On the other corner of Storey Road was the Chequers pub. It has a long heritage in the High street and I understand from various local history books that it was one of the stage coach stops for Wragg's horse drawn coaches that ran into the City of London. As you can see from the picture below, billiards were available there in the past. What is now MetroBet was Rossi's other ice cream parlour in the High Street.



The Chequers pub with a brick wall for Billiards.

Courtesy of Google Earth

Opposite Rossi's was Terry's Sweet stalls; A double pitch that sold all manner of sweets including Cough Candy, honeycomb and the Pink & White Coconut Ice that was displayed on a tray and cut & weighed to the customers preference.

A bit further up on the same side as Terry's stalls was Berry's Piano shop. The shop also sold sheet music and all manner of musical instruments - but the tag line was "Berry's for Piano's".

Across the road and on the corner of Truro Road was a small furniture shop. Next door was a stationery & book shop called Smith's. Although I'm sure that it was not affiliated to the W.H. Smith chain it sold all manner of Pens, Pencils and books. All the books were displayed on floor to ceiling wooden shelving, spines outwards, behind a wooden topped counter. It was a de-rigueur stop for me and my pals to purchase Enid Blyton books as well as our "ready for the new school year" set of "platinum" felt tipped pens. The bigger the set, the more shades & hues you received. Naturally the favourite colours were well worn out before the end of term and invariably you were left with the "not so eye catching" colours. In addition the pen caps were well chewed as we concentrated on annotating our exercise books - what the teachers probably called "defacing".

A few shops along from Smiths were Leslie Bros, a double fronted ladies apparel shop of longevity and distinction. It also had a stall or two outside for more affordable clothing. Advertisements for the shop can still be seen, albeit faintly, on the wall above the shop. Directly across the road from Smiths and Leslie Bros was Percivals, a mecca for Bikes (as was Belchambers in Palmerston Road) and Toys. It was situated on the corner of Selborne Avenue and was a triple fronted shop. At Christmas their window displays were fabulous and I'm sure that most Walthamstow children wished that they would be the recipient of some of their stock.

Outside Percivals was the double stall of the "broken biscuit" man. Although he did a roaring trade in biscuits that were slightly damaged and selling them by the bag. He also sold "perfect" biscuits from companies such as "Peek Freens" and "Huntley & Palmers". Alas, these brands are not usually seen nowadays and have probably been amalgamated into conglomerate companies.

Just a few shops past the junction of Erskine Road was the start of the Palace Parade. The shops were set back from the rest of the high street hence the pavement was wider there. Originally the site had been the Palace Theatre, but it had been demolished and new shops with flats above had been built around the 1950's early 1960's. I certainly remember the start of the parade with the cafe at the start followed by a massive house wares shop called the "House of Holland". In 1986 I bought a large round pine dining table from there costing the princely sum of £99. I still use the table today and each time I move house, one of the first questions I have is "will I fit me table in"?

One of the pitches outside the House of Holland belonged to Helen, Irv's wife. Like Irv she sold Denims & T-shirts and I was often dispatched "up" the market to see if Helen had something in stock for a customer.

Opposite the House of Holland was a "dispensing optician" shop with a stall outside. The owner was a man of limited height (Dwarf), however what he could do for you with a spectacles prescription was amazing and much cheaper than buying direct from the optician. He was also excellent at repairing spectacle frames or putting your lenses into new frames. He always had queues at the stall as his range of frames and his willingness to help a customer and work a bit of magic with broken frames and lenses were legendary. Next door to the optician was an independent dispensing chemist with a tiled step that you had to negotiate up into the shop. Again their Christmas displays were always bright & cheerful with coloured bubble baths and toiletry gift sets. These shops no longer exist as the gas showrooms in the Selbourne Walk complex now occupy the site.

On the other side of the road and at the end of the palace parade and right opposite Colebrook Road was a pancake house; A forerunner of the "fast food" that we have gotten used to over the years. The shop stood proud of the rest of the parade and navigating the pavement was a bit of a problem. However, once past the pancake house the pavement widened considerably where a cobbled opening to a courtyard behind the shops was a "devil to navigate in high heels". Next to that was another branch of Appletons. As with their branch further down the high street, they sold all manner of tinned foodstuff, sweets, confectionery and tobacco much cheaper than other outlets. At Christmas time Appletons was really useful for "stocking filler" confectionery. Outside Appletons was Yossie's stall. He was Irv's brother in law (Helen's brother) and sold T-shirts and sweatshirts in summer and Jumpers in the winter.

Opposite Appletons, on the corner of Colebrook Road was a branch of Tesco that had taken over the old Carton cinema site. It had an escalator in the shop to take you up to the first floor where the Home and Ware were located. All in all it was a bit of a "grubby" shop with rows of chest freezers as soon as you entered and shelving above them piled high with goods. At that time Sainsbury was the favoured supermarket with Tesco being seen as a bit "down at heel". How times have changed.

Outside Tesco was the Sarsaparilla stall. Hot, Cold, Large, Small, drink there or takeaway.... it didn't matter and a hot Sarsaparilla on a winter day was most welcome. In the winter hot chestnuts were available from the brazier, shovelled into a "Percy Daltons" paper bag: Just great for munching whilst moseying through the market.

Just inside Westbury Rd was Gillard's the meat pie and sausage factory. The brand was well known and many cafes' in London sold their products but unfortunately it is no longer operational and housing has now taken over the site.

On the other side of the high street was a parade of shops that ended next to the "old" Monoux School. Although the school had relocated to Chingford Road many years earlier, the building was still used by LBWF right up until the late 1970's. However it was demolished to make way for the Selbourne Walk shopping centre. The school stood where BHS now resides.

The next major buildings I remember are the Central Library and the Baths. I believe that the baths closed at somepoint in the 1970's, but the Central Library is still there. In the foyer of the library was an old map of Walthamstow, framed on the wall. Unfortunately there was a fire in the library and I'm not sure whether it was ever salvaged. It was a fabulous indicator of Walthamstow and showed how much the area had changed from rural to urban.

Opposite the library was a branch of Ryman's stationery store and next to that was the Times furnishing store which was on the corner of Cleveland Park Road. On the other corner of the road was the Gas Showrooms. It was a haven of all domestic gas appliances with stairs down the to the payment area which has a beautiful tiled effect floor. I often wonder if the Gas showroom had been part of a house that stood in the High Street as the architecture was magnificent and far too beautiful for a humble showroom. The tills were also something to behold. Massive in size, the bill was placed in a slot at the side of the till and after a soft "clunk", stamped with the payment date.



The Central Library on the left and the site of the Times Furnishing on the right (now the 99p stores) at the corner of Cleveland Park Road.

Courtesy of Google Earth

Opposite the Gas showrooms was a small fancy goods shop called the Lighthouse. It stood on the corner of an alleyway which I believe was called Rosebank Villas. It used to sell all manner of imported furnishing goods including lighting. On a winter afternoon it certainly was a "light" house.

Next to the Gas showrooms were a branch of Lockey's which sold handbags, luggage and purses. Their shop formed the beginning of the "Arcade". On the other side of the arcade entrance stood wet fishmongers. The arcade itself wound its way upwards towards Hoe St and housed shops such as Waltham Wools, John Menzies and ended with Kings the florist which formed the corner shop out onto Hoe street.

However in the main High St, after the arcade was a massive Post office on the corner of Hoe St and the High street. Unfortunately none of these shops or arcade exists anymore. In the name of development, from the corner of Cleveland Park Road to Hoe Street, they were demolished a number of years ago and as far as I am aware, to date the site has not been developed.

I have enjoyed my "memory" walk of the High Street and the market and I hope you have too. Thanks to Google Earth I can still see shadows of the past, they just require a new way of looking for them. My advice, look upwards.....above the shop facades.

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