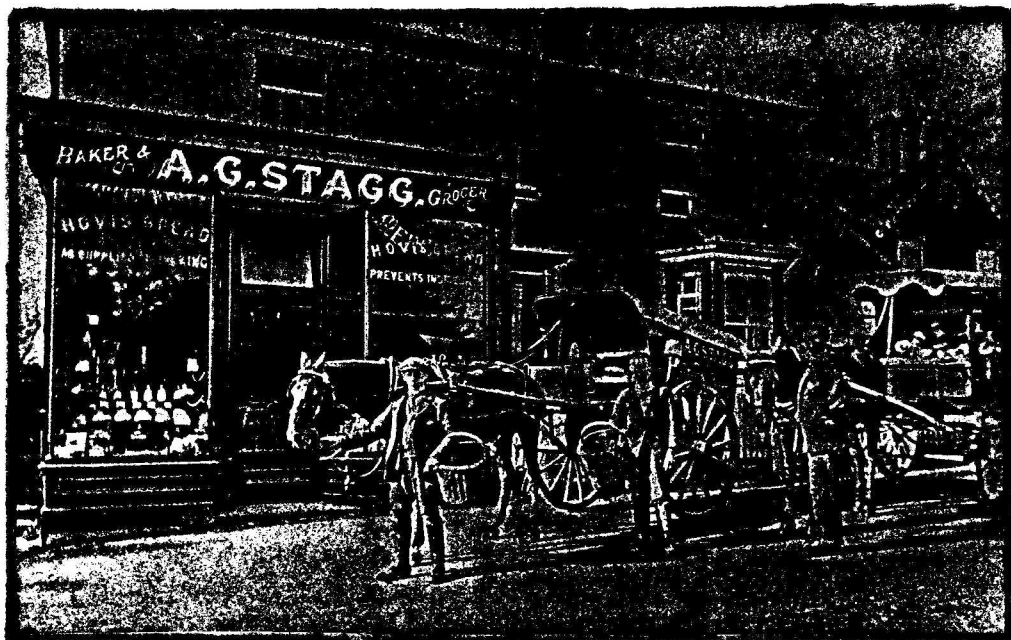
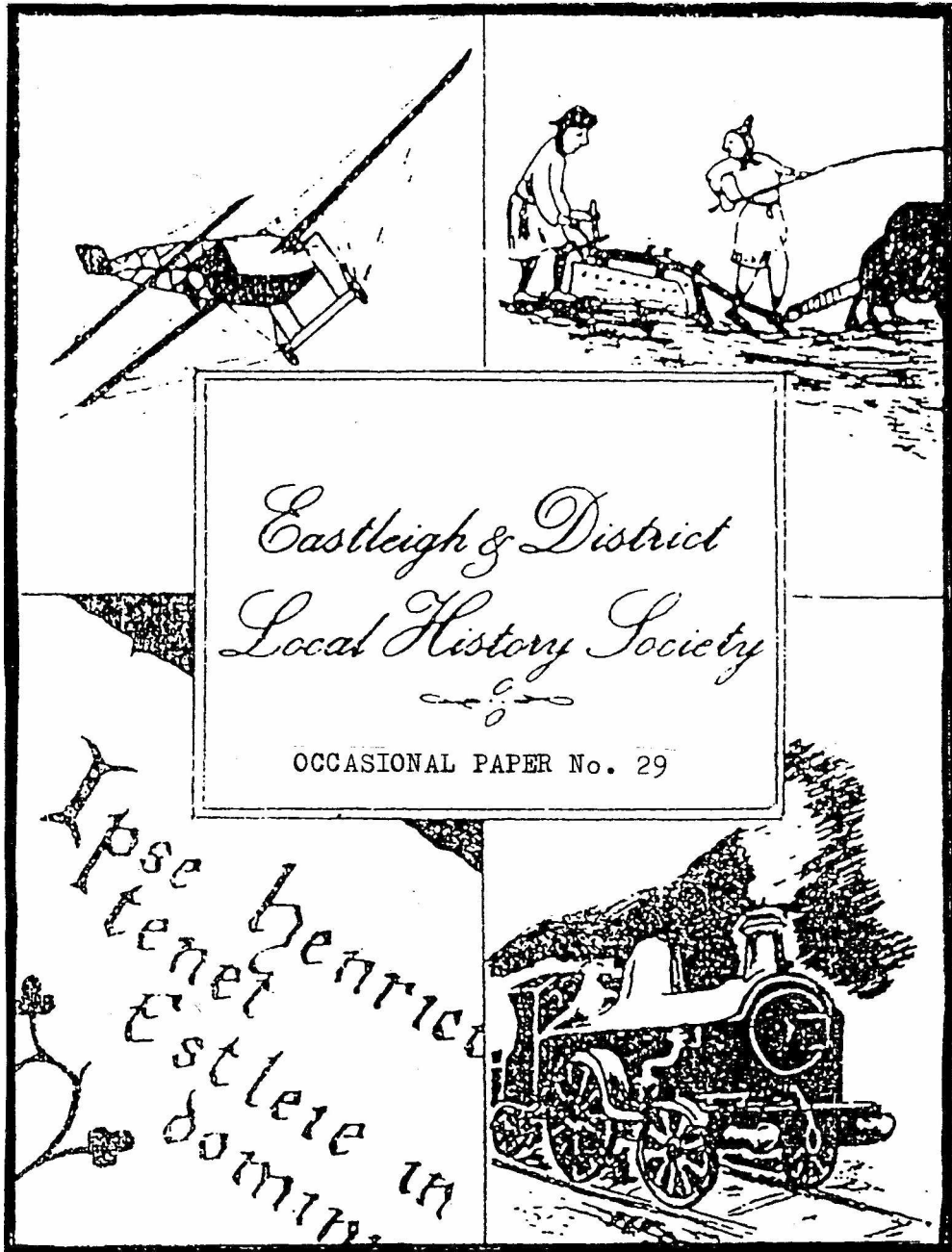
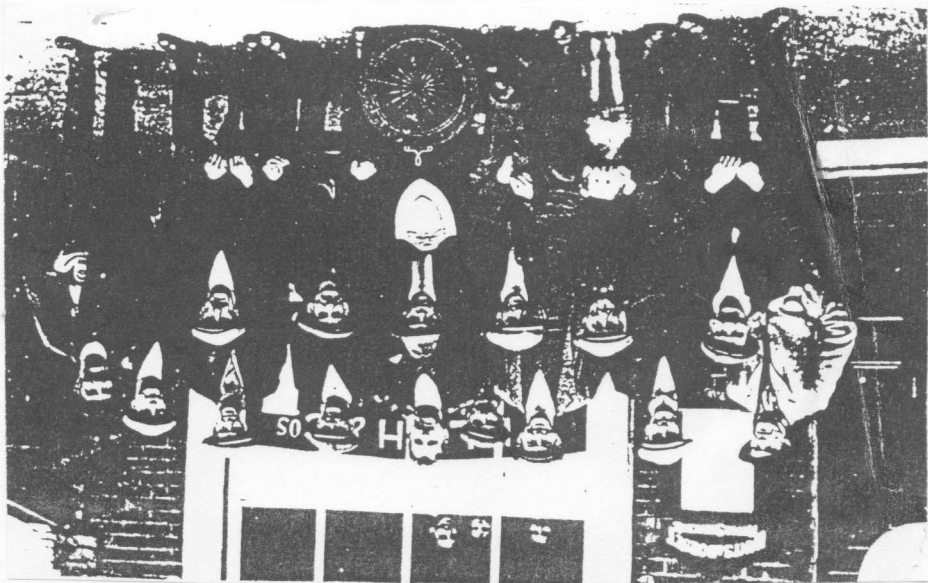
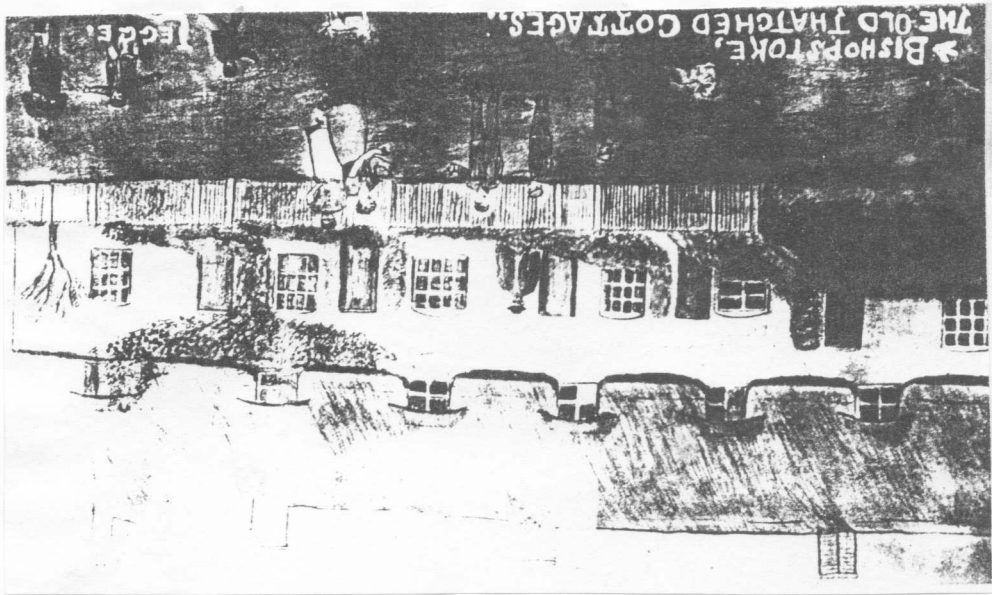
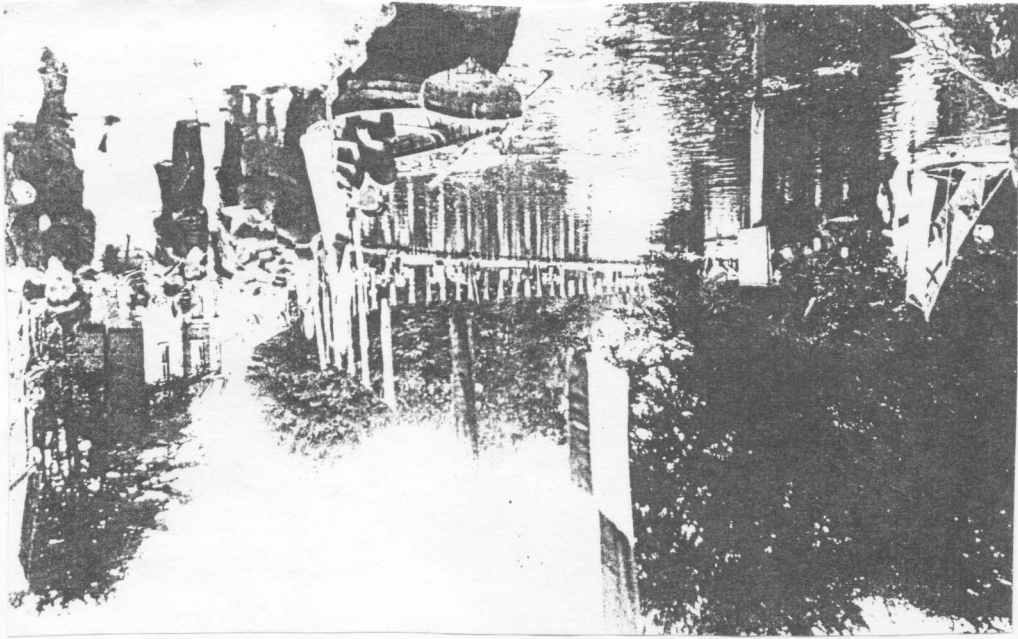


Reminiscences of childhood and later at Stoke Common.





REMISCENCES OF CHILDHOOD AT STOKE COMMON

I can remember when I was a small child coming home from school in the winter, so pleased to get home to a lovely coal fire and the kettle singing on the hob. We had a wonderful Mother, so caring and warm, and also a very loving Dad. We lived in a little cottage by a Pub called The Foresters Arms which is still standing but so much different now to what it was in those days. My Dad used to like a pint of beer there on a Saturday evening. I could lie in bed at night and hear them turning out at closing time, saying good-night to one another and walking away down the gritted road until I couldn't hear them any more. Sometimes they would stand and sing.

My parents were quite poor and worked very hard; money wasn't easy to come by in those days. My Dad had to walk two miles to work and back again in all weathers and he never stayed at home. He worked at the Railway Works. At weekends, he spent his time in the garden which was very large; he used to grow lots of vegetables and everything was kept very neat. He also kept chickens and I can remember when we kept ducks and geese. There was a big galvanised bath for the ducks to jump in and out of. My Mum used to make mats of cloth sewn on canvas which made a pattern of different colours. They made the rooms look very neat and warm.

Summer was a happy time and the sun always seemed to shine on our houses - there were six of them all in row. At the beginning of summer when it started to get warm, we children would arrive home from school with our coats wrapped around us like long skirts - that was the girls, of course. The other children who lived in the village and I used to play in a little stream. We used to paddle there for hours with old shoes on our feet because of the stones and go under the bridge. The stream was called Bowlake and it was much cleaner than it is today. Another lovely place where we spent many happy hours was in the water meadows - it was called The Lyed. There were lots of different streams there, some deep, some shallow. In mid-summer, there used to be horse daisies and shivery grass in the meadows. I picked bunches of them and took them home to my Mum. She would keep the grass all the year round in vases in the front room.

I had a brother and sister. My sister was much older than me (fourteen years older). She was in service as most girls were when they left school at fourteen. We had fun when she came home - half a day a week and every other Sunday afternoon. In the summer, my sister used to come home for a nice holiday and she used to bring me some lovely presents. I looked forward to sleeping with her. My brother, Fred, was seven years older than me and I thought he knew everything; he told us all sorts of tales. He used to help our Dad quite a lot, doing all sorts of jobs.

Sometimes, he used to take me with him to gather ferns and I rode in the wheelbarrow. My Dad made a shed of ferns, binding them all together on the outside. It stood for years.

There were so many games we children used to play and we had seasons for the various games. There were spinning tops, which we kept going with a whip, and hoops - we would run races with them and I can remember running up the hill with mine to meet my Dad and brother from work. The girls had wooden hoops and the boys had iron ones with a skimmer; these were made by the Blacksmith who lived opposite our house and you could hear him tapping away all day in his workshop. In the winter, when the lights went on early, it used to look very pretty, especially when the snow was on the ground. He lived in a house next door to his shop and his wife's name was Sally. It was a regular saying in our house when she lit her gas lights, "Sally's lit up, it's time we did". I can remember that the Blacksmith had a brother who walked round all the village lighting the gas lamps with a long pole. He did it every evening for years. The name of the people at the Blacksmith's was Woodford and they attended the Chapel along with their sons and daughters. They taught the children of the Chapel which is in Stoke Common Road and that is where my children also went when they were small. The building is still there but it is not used as a chapel now. We enjoyed going to Sunday School and sometimes we had what was called "Magic Lantern" which showed pictures although they didn't move; I thought it was lovely. Then there was the Band of Hope once a week in the evening. I loved going out in the dark with the other children in the winter. In the summer, we would have a Band of Hope tea at the Mount, where Mr. & Mrs. Cotton lived before it became a hospital. I seem to recall that we had to take our own mug and we all enjoyed our tea with lots of slab cake.

The Pub called The Foresters used to have four trees in front - I think they were lime trees - but when the buses started to run up there, they had to be chopped down. I was about ten or eleven years old then.

Another time I always looked forward to was Christmas morning. About 6 a.m., the Chapel choir would come round carrying lanterns and singing carols. It was really lovely and you could hear them in the distance as they went further down the road. If I heard them first, I would call my brother and, of course, Mum and Dad enjoyed them too although they couldn't hear them quite as well as us because their bedroom was at the back of the house.

Where the Wimpey houses are now used to be allotments and on summer weekends and evenings there were always men working on the land; some had their wives and children to help them.

Most people grew their own vegetables in those days. We children used to run around there with our hoops and have races. Starting from the Foresters Arms, some would go by Stoke Common Road and some by Church Road and see who got back first to the starting point. It was good fun.

By the Foresters before the war, there was a bakehouse where bread and cakes were baked; it used to smell lovely and made you feel hungry. The man who used to cook there was Mr. Palmer and he used to deliver round the houses. Sometimes, I would go to the bakehouse and buy a lovely lardy cake or dough cake, still warm, for tea. The bakehouse was closed down for a few years - I can't remember why - but when it re-opened, it was alive with crickets; they were everywhere and you could hear them all the time. There was another well-known baker, named Mr. Snailgrove, who lived at the top of Spring Lane. I can remember him riding in a van delivering bread. There was also a shop in Church Road where bread was made. It was on the left, and, although small, I can remember the name of the people who lived there. It was Stagg and they were followed by Mr. & Mrs. George, who used to call on me in later years. The shop on the corner of St. Margaret's Road sold sweets and I think it was kept by two elderly ladies named Dobson – that's quite 60 years ago now.

In the summer, on a Sunday evening, Mum, Dad, my brother and I would go for a long walk up through Brambridge, turn right at the cross roads where there was a Public House called the Brickmakers Arms, which is now a private house. It was real]y nice there, a very old-fashioned place where they used to sell sweets and all kinds of things. It was always crowded outside in the garden. They had chickens and pigs which used to wander inside; they kept geese too. There were always lovely flowers there, such as kingcups and milkmaids, because it was rather boggy. I have such happy memories of it all.

We would walk home when it was almost dark, in the company of quite a few other families sometimes holding arms and singing little ditties. Sometimes, we would turn left at the crossroads and come to the Dog and Crook, where we enjoyed lemonade and crisps. I still went there sometimes when I grew up, with my husband and children. There wasn't much traffic about in those days which made it more enjoyable. I still go there from time to time when taken by car.

Earlier on, I mentioned my sister, Ada, coming home on holiday in the summer. Sometimes, we would get up early and, before breakfast, we would walk through Stoke Woods; it was so peaceful and fresh at that time of day. I've spent many happy hours there, perhaps having a picnic or picking nuts.

When I was about fourteen, I loved going to the cinema; it was very cheap in those days compared with now. I used to worry my Dad for sixpence so that I could go and one day, to my surprise, he gave me a shilling. Then I was able to go on the bus - threepence for the return fare, sixpence for the pictures and threepence for sweets - all that for just 5p. in money now.

In Church Road there is a little Recreation Ground with swings - I played there as a girl but there were no swings then. Sometimes a band would come and play on a Sunday evening. That was very exciting and we used to run all round the band, letting off steam as it were. Just on top of the hill in the same road, before you come to the allotments, there was a huge oak tree which was a landmark as it could be seen a long way off. There were always owls in the tree and if you walked by on a winter evening, you could hear them hooting - a lovely sound, I used to think. But the tree became unsafe and had to be taken down. It was called Borough Tree because it was on Borough Hill.

Just beyond the Foresters Arms in Church Road lived Mr. & Mrs. Lock, small farmers, who kept a few cows and used to deliver milk. My mother hung a can on a hook and Mr. Lock would measure the milk out from a big churn. Sometimes, I was sent to the house to buy skimmed milk in a big jug. I used to drink some on the way home. My brother has told me that they once kept sheep, but I can't remember that. They sold sweets and I can remember going to buy some on a Sunday afternoon when we had an older cousin of mine to tea.

There used to be a man who came all the way from Winchester on a Sunday afternoon to sell ice cream, a real treat in those days. If my sister was at home, she would sometimes buy us all a wafer for tea. It cost about a penny for a cornet and twopence or threepence for a wafer - in old money, of course. This man came in a horse and trap and he would shout "Gooda! Gooda!" - he was an Italian.

When I was eleven, I became a Girl Guide and we used the school for this purpose one evening a week. In the summer, once a year we were invited to tea at Mr. Bourne's house by the river, near where the old Church used to be. It was called Manor House and had lovely grounds. After tea, we had races and we were given a box of chocolates before going home. Mr. Bourne would stand by the doorway and hand us a box as we went out, saying "Deliver these to Red Lane", meaning, of course, down our throat. I can see him now with his kind, smiling face and long white beard.

Where the River Inn stands now, there was a private house called St. Agnes, occupied by a Dr. & Mrs. Grayham, retired, I think, when I worked there at the age of fourteen. I was a between maid and had to help the cook and the parlour maid. When I helped to make the beds with the parlour maid, she used to say, "First the foot and then the head, that's the way to make a bed." I also worked at the Mount for a year or so when it was a T.B. hospital. I had met my future husband by then - I was just seventeen. Neither he nor my Mum liked me working there, so as I grew older I had a variety of jobs. At one time, I worked at Pirelli-General. I was on shifts, 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. I used to cycle and it was very dark in the mornings about 5.30 a.m. I left there just before the war to get married, but about a year later my husband was called up to join the Army, which meant he was away for the duration. It was lovely when the war was over and he came home again, safe. I already had our first son, so now we were all together.

Before the war, in addition to Eastleigh Carnival, there used to be Bisbopstoke Carnival which attracted a big crowd. Riverside was lit up with pretty lights, reflected in the water, so you can guess how lovely it looked. It all came to an end when the war broke out.

I lived at Stoke Common for forty-six years. When I got married, I just moved next door to Mum and Dad. When I was aged forty-six, we had to move into a house on the Council estate off Underwood Road in Cotton Close (named after Mr. Cotton of the Mount). I did miss Stoke Common with its open fields after all those years. I had such happy memories that I think I went up there every day to see my brother and my sister-in-law. One day, as I was passing on my way to see them, there was a bulldozer flattening our old houses. Of course, that upset me, although we now had a better house with modern conveniences which we never had at the old house.

By now, my sister was living at Colden Common but, later on, she lived at Meller House. I lived at Cotton Close for nearly twenty-two years and from there my two sons were married. Now, since my husband died, I live in a flat in Spring Lane.

It's lovely to look back over the years. Of course, we had our ups and downs but, on the whole, they were very happy days.

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