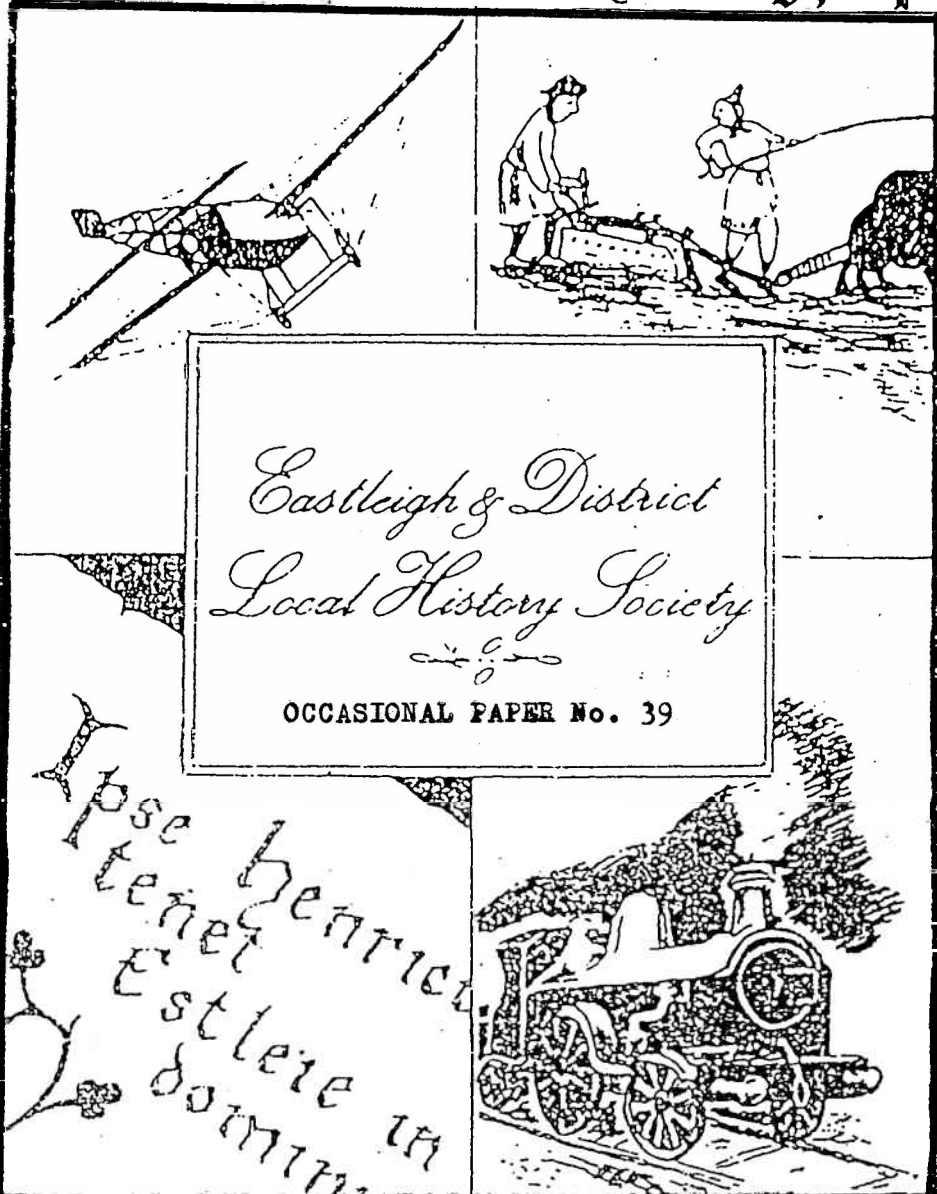


Thoughts on the Railway and Eastleigh's Past



THOUGHTS ON THE RAILWAY AND EASTLEIGH'S PAST

The first train to run through Eastleigh was on 10th June 1839. It could only go as far as Winchester since the line from there to Basingstoke being laid by the London and Southampton Company was not finished. People living in Portsmouth, to which town there was to be a branch line, disliked the name and it was changed to the London and South Western Railway Company. In 1923 it merged with other lines to become the Southern Railway. (Since then, the railways have been nationalised and denationalised and the local system is known as South West Trains.)

Eastleigh became the heart of the London and South Western Railway when in 1890-91 the Carriage Works moved from Nine Elms to the tithing of Barton near the village of Bishopstoke, later to be called Eastleigh, with the Locomotive Works also coming in 1909-10. Both Works had their own Fire Brigade and Brass Bands which always led our Eastleigh carnivals with numerous tableaux built by the men of both Works during their spare time. People came from miles around to enjoy them year after year.

Opposite the Carriage Works was the Dining Hall and just round the corner is Dutton Lane which was named after Mr. Ralph Dutton who at that time was the Chairman of the old London and South Western Railway, but long before then the road was known as Fisherman's Lane. The railway was responsible for building all the cottages on the left hand side of the lane for their firemen and other top staff who might be called in any emergency. The lane continued up to the sports ground and at the far end and between the railway line and the River Itchen, looking east, you could see a large house called The Mount. It was first built by Mr. W. Twynam, and was later owned by Captain Walker and by Captain Hargraves. In 1893 Mr. T.A. Cotton purchased the original house and rebuilt it with an aviary and a natural history museum. He lived at The Mount for thirty years.

Mr. Cotton was a great benefactor to Eastleigh in many ways from 1893-1923. The Mount was a really grand place and there was a large stone stairway leading down to the river. On school "treat" days held at The Mount, we school children used to play on the beautiful steps and in the grounds, which Mr. Cotton had planted with rare trees from all over the world.

Everyone in Eastleigh knew The Mount and what a splendid view of it there was from the Railway Sports Ground when you looked east on a fine day. The Sports Ground had a large Grandstand on the west side and that's where we boys always used to make for. There was a cycle track with suitable banking right round the ground and several football pitches in the centre which were always in use in those days.

Eastleigh was noted for its sportsmen like Tommy Green, the world famous Olympic Gold Medal winner, and Mr. George Wright who was always playing bowls on the LSWR greens at the original Railway Institute, which was built by the Railway Company for the benefit of its workers and the people of Eastleigh in 1891 at the high cost of £3,000 (a lot of money in those days).

Eastleigh had its Variety Theatre long before Mr. Wright had his cinemas. My parents used to take me to all the live shows on the stage but, being a young boy of about ten years of age in 1920, I couldn't fully appreciate what I saw on the stage. However, I thought the silent films were great when I saw them at the two penny matinees in the old Picture Palace. Then Mr. Wright, who owned the theatre as well, brought them both up to date, renaming them the Picture House and the Regal. Together with the concerts and dances at the Railway Institute and the Town Hall, Eastleigh had more entertainment in those days than in today's modern Eastleigh.

To me, as a growing lad, it was all very exciting and I took a special interest in all the local history. There was much to learn and talk about, such as Cranbury House, Brambridge and the fine old mansion at North Stoneham which was the residence of the Fleming family from the beginning of the nineteenth century. At Stoneham there was an 18 hole golf course where as a boy I caddied for the gentlemen and their ladies and friends who came in their beautiful cars like Bugattis, Bentleys and Rolls Royces. The latter had the R.R. letters in red (not black as today) on nickel plated radiators before chromium was ever invented.

The old LSWR certainly made Eastleigh famous with the well known locomotives built here, such as the Lord Nelson and the King Arthur types. The Repton was shipped to Canada where it is still in service and much to be admired by the English over there.

To the south of Eastleigh lies the Airport which is so rich in history. It all started with Eric Moon flying his homemade aircraft on short flights. That was between 1909 and 1910, the year I was born in Eastleigh. There has been much development since then. Mr. R. J. Mitchell, chief designer for the Supermarine at Woolston, worked on the Schneider Trophy monoplanes which raced over the Solent and became world famous, winning the Trophy outright. The S.4, a small monoplane with cantilever wings, was in fact the first Spitfire to be born on Eastleigh's flying fields fifty years ago and that makes my home town unique.

Going further south into Swaythling and Bassett, there is more history to be found. During the first World War the Royal Artillery had their Remount Camp spread over that area where they treated the horses and mules before they went for duties overseas. I remember all the soldiers in their uniforms tugging the very stubborn mules, but not so much the horses. I had it explained to me that mules had long ears and kicked more. My uncle worked as a civilian blacksmith in the camp and when off duty he used to take me round to see the gun carriages and the animals. That's how I know where the saying, "stubborn as a mule" came from.

As I grew older, I would walk into Winchester with other boys to see the sights as we used to say. We admired the very old walls and the cathedral which we learned about at school. We knew that the city, only seven miles away, had been the capital of England before London. We learned about the Kings and Queens, which I found interesting and educating.

Southampton, in the other direction, was only five and a half miles away and I walked there many times to see the sights. It was known as the Gateway of the World and it was a great adventure for a small lad coming twelve years of age. The Docks with the ships were most interesting, especially the Floating Dock, large enough to accommodate any liner in the world - it was really wonderful engineering.

I used to get a dock-side Fishing Pass to enter the Docks and I learned about the four funnel liners by talking to the seamen and stevedores. They pointed out the ships to me and told me their names, such as the Aquitania, the Mauritania, the Majestic and the Olympic. Unfortunately, I never saw the Titanic which was to become so famous; she came to grief two years after I was born.

My father was a sea-faring man, very well read and much travelled for his day. He told me all about the sea and ships that sailed the world. In his younger days he was a Cape Horner, but he came to admire the steamships such as the Titanic; hence my great interest in Southampton.

We used to wait to see the boat trains which the LSWR ran from Waterloo to Southampton three times a week. It was great to see the locomotives with the name of the liner on the smoke-box and all the Pullman coaches looking very smart and bearing their individual names, such as Diane, Daphne and Bournemouth Belle, on the side.

The County of Hampshire is full of history and it was Mr. Drewitt, my teacher at Chamberlayne Road School, who made me appreciate the New Forest where the Kings of England used to hunt and Portsmouth with Southsea Castle and the forts in the Solent which were built over springs so that each fort had its own supply of fresh water - quite a feat for men of those olden days.

I remember my Chamberlayne Road school days very well. I hadn't been there long before we were all transferred to Derby Road School which was two storeys high. All the Chamberlayne Road boys were there for the duration of the war because our school was made into a hospital for the wounded soldiers sent home from France. They all wore light blue uniforms with red ties and black boots.

It was about 1920-21 before our school was opened up for us again. I well remember the Headmaster, Mr. Whetmore, a rather tall man, very smart in appearance. Being a small boy, I had to look up at him whenever he spoke to me. Then there was Mr. Hartnell, a very smart little man. My own class teacher was Mr. Arthur Drewitt and it was he who first made me take an interest in Geography and History, which became my favourite subjects. In all, apart from the war years, my school days at Chamberlayne Road were very happy indeed. I am sure that anyone who wants to know the history of Eastleigh should start by reading Mr. Drewitt's book, EASTLEIGH'S YESTERDAYS.

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