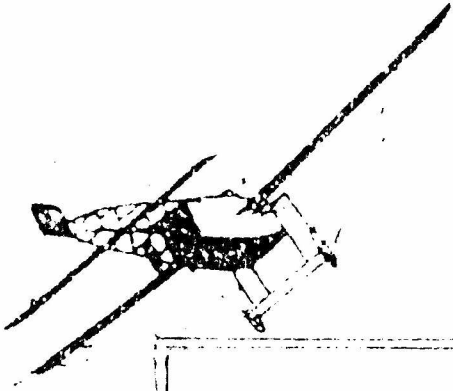


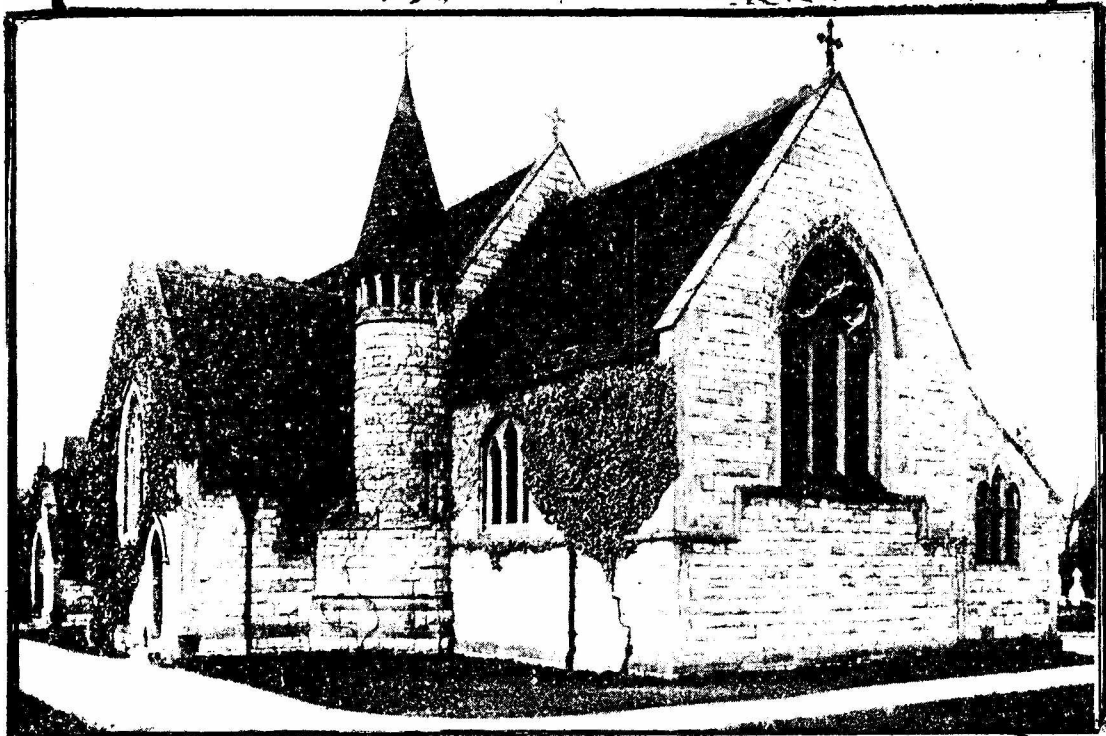
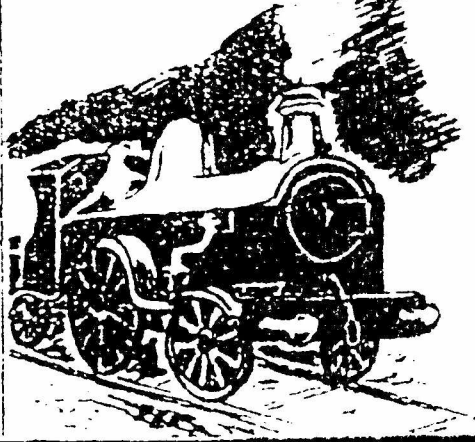
# Memories of an Eastleigh Vicar's Son

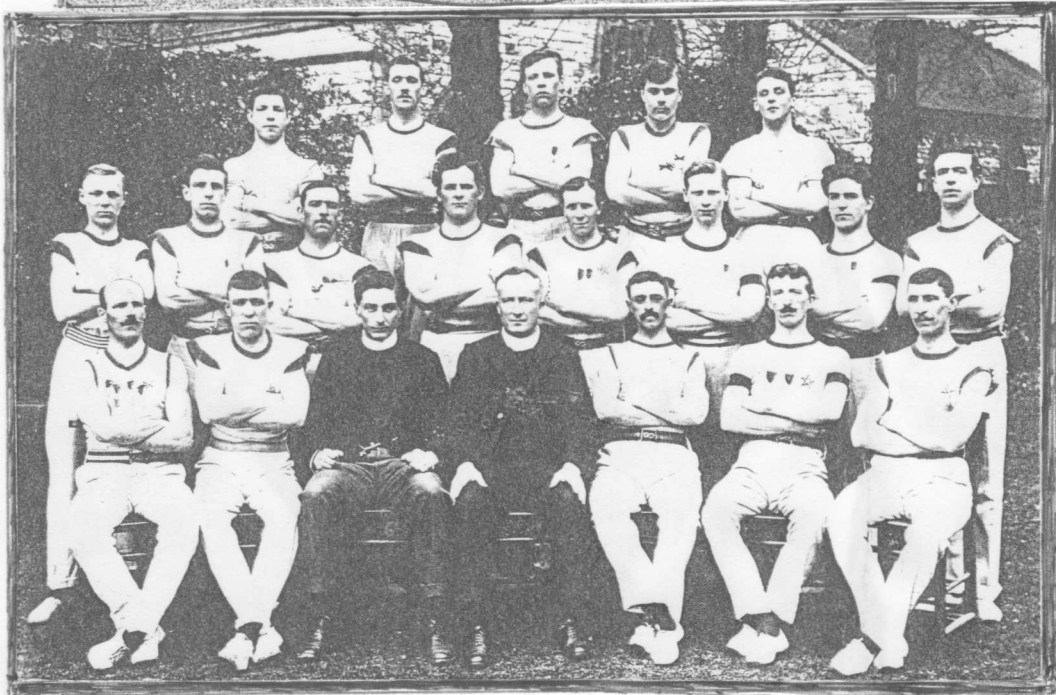
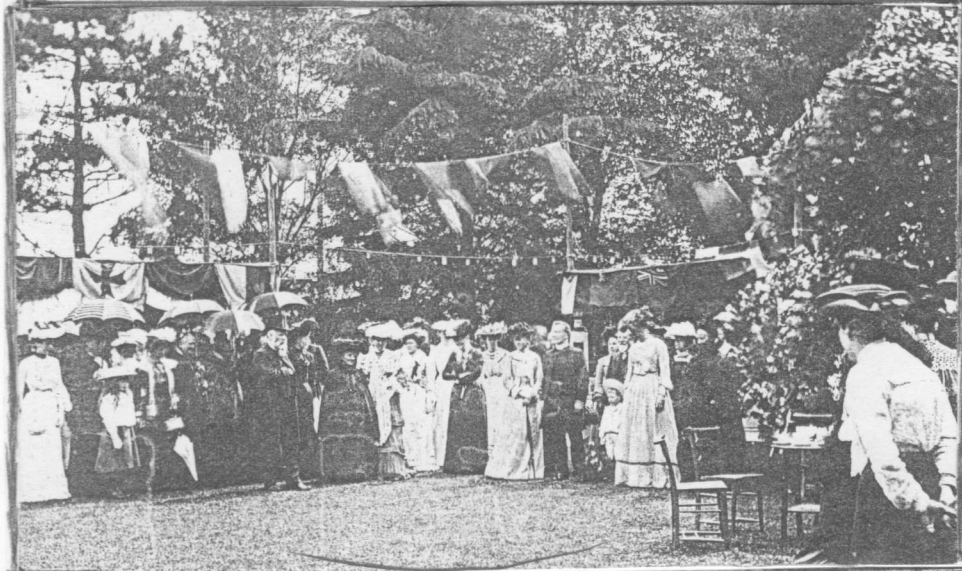
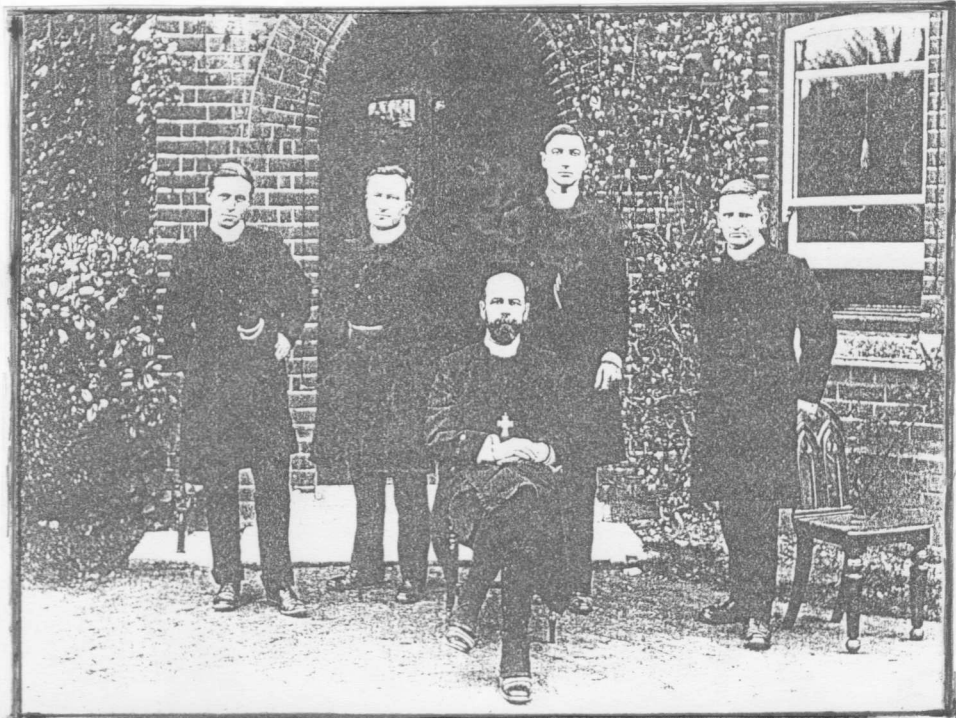


*Eastleigh & District  
Local History Society*

OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 40

*Jose Heinrich  
Tenet  
Estlere in  
domus.*





## RECOLLECTIONS OF EASTLEIGH IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THIS CENTURY

In 1902, when I was three years old, my father, Reverend Cyril Herbert Thompson, was appointed Vicar of Eastleigh. At the time he was Minor Canon of Winchester Cathedral and Chaplain of the Hospital and of the Prison. His immediate main commission from Bishop Ryle was to complete the enlargement of the Parish Church initiated by Reverend R. C. M. Harvey before his translation to the town of Dewsbury in Yorkshire. This was achieved in 1905, when on 29th April the completed church was consecrated by the Bishop. It was a curious structure, which involved an entirely new building added on the south side to the old and smaller church, which henceforth acted as a north aisle to correspond to a long and narrow south aisle in the new building .

Eastleigh was a quickly growing place owing to the transfer of the London and South Western Railway Works from Nine Elms during the last quarter of the 19th century. The rapid increase in the population, mainly towards Southampton, necessitated the provision of a Mission Church at that end of the town, which had been consecrated by Bishop Ryle in 1891 to minister to the growing needs of the area. It soon became clear that this would have to be a temporary measure and that a larger permanent building would soon become essential. So in November 1903 the Bishop asked my father to consider the provision of a site on which to build a permanent church to take the place of the Mission Church. It was estimated that a sum of £20,000 would be needed, so an Appeal was launched over a wide area of the diocese. I well remember folding appeals and putting them into long envelopes to be posted to all and sundry. As an added incentive, my father preached on behalf of this new venture in churches in all the large towns - Winchester, Southampton, Portsmouth, and Bournemouth. In those days the daily post included Sundays and on one Monday morning a cheque for £1,000 came from someone in Bournemouth. Eventually the money was raised and on 4th June 1910 All Saints Church was dedicated for a congregation of 600.

A glutton for work, my father certainly got plenty of it in Eastleigh. The railway people were loyal, responsive and generous in their giving of time and money and in support of the many and varied parish organisations. Fortunately, he had the assistance of four or five clergy, a Deaconess, and a lady Church Worker. This was not so ease-making as it sounds, for one of my father's most important duties was to train newly ordained deacons for the priesthood. This meant that, apart from a fairly senior assistant priest, they moved on to other parishes after 3 or 4 years and he had to start again on a new lot. He certainly did train them extremely well, as they were quick to testify.

In fact, he made them work so hard and punctiliously that he was given the name of 'Pharaoh', because 'he was a hard man'. But they bore him gratitude rather than resentment. They all used to come to supper on Sunday nights and let their hair down. But on Monday mornings at the Staff meeting, they had to report on their previous week's work and get their orders for the coming one. There was certainly enough to do, what with a choir of 60 under a first class organist, H. J. Batho, a Sunday School of about 900 children, Men's Bible Class, and other organisations to be encouraged. Every Monday evening my father held a Sunday School Teachers meeting. Being very musical himself - he had been organ scholar at Cuddesdon Theological College - and possessing a very good tenor voice, he never failed to attend choir practices. My mother, too, took a full part in parish life, the Mothers' Union being her particular interest. But for my father easily the most important part of a priest's ministry was visiting the people in their own homes, something he insisted on with all his trainee assistant priests. He knew them and they knew him and that he was interested in them and their families, their joys and their sorrows. He used to carry a small visiting card on which was written, "the Vicar has called and is sorry not to have seen you". This he posted in the letter box if the occupiers were out.

It was in this kind of setting that I spent my most impressionable years up to the age of 14. Being an only child, I had for the most part to find my own amusements. The large vicarage garden provided plenty of interest. There was a high brick wall on three sides separating us from the back gardens of terraced houses on two and a half sides and the large Infants School on the remaining half. I used to walk along the top of it all the way round without let or hindrance. Sometimes I would talk to and tease our dear old gardener, Mr. Ball, who came in every day. We had a cook called Annie and a house parlour maid called Eva, who slept at the top of the three-storied and spacious vicarage. Eva used to take me for walks in the afternoons. Sometimes we would go almost as far as Chandlers Ford, often to Bishopstoke. But my chief enjoyment was in the spring when we would go to Stoke Woods or to a wood near Allbrook to pick primroses.

When I was about 4 or 5, I indulged for a time in a somewhat unusual diversion. What motivated me I do not know. Every morning at about 10 o'clock the priest on duty for the week would say Matins in the old part of the Parish Church. A few elderly ladies with time to spare used to attend. I hit on the idea of sitting in the back pew on the north side and moving forward a pew every day till I got to the front, carefully avoiding any pew which was already occupied. Then I crossed over to the front pew on the south side and moved back a pew each day till I got to the last one, after which I crossed to the north side again and the process was repeated.

This strange manoeuvre came to an abrupt end. One morning I was the only worshipper. So the priest decided to take the Service in the chancel. The psalms were always said antiphonally, so I found myself having a verbal duet with him. After about half a psalm, over which I found great difficulty in doing my share, I panicked, put down my book, and fled the church, leaving him to finish the office by himself. I think that was the end of my strange urge to daily worship.

A year or two later I had two boys of similar age to play with me in the mornings. Both were doctors' sons; Alfred Langley's father practised in Leigh Road, Dick Simmons's in Bishopstoke. In due course our parents all combined to provide a governess for us on five mornings in the week, going to each other's house in turn for a stated period. Miss Mortimer came from Swaythling and we liked her very much. This profitable entry into the educational world continued till at the age of 9 we all departed to our different Preparatory Schools. Alfred eventually joined the Navy and at the age of 15 was called up to serve on a battleship at the outbreak of the Great War. In the course of time Dick Simmons and I went to the same school, Lancing, in Sussex, and then to the same Oxford College, Oriel, where we shared rooms for our first year. He became a doctor, taking over his father's practice for several years before moving to Eastleigh after his father died.

A very pleasant diversion when I was about 8 years old was the opening of a roller-skating rink in the Drill Hall by a man and wife, whose name I forget. Their charges were modest and even more so for children. From time to time when the normal session was over, they would allow the young and energetic to play roller skate hockey.

In January 1914 we left Eastleigh for Newport, Isle of Wight, where my father had been appointed to the Parish of St. Thomas, the metropolitan church of the island. It was hard to leave so many enjoyments and activities to which I had become accustomed. Amongst these I must mention briefly the thrill of hearing a very fine Salvation Army Band, the Annual Carnival on the Recreation Ground between Romsey and Leigh Roads, parties and dances in the Council Offices at the end of Romsey Road, and visits to Southampton with my father on Boxing Day to watch the 'Saints' play at the Dell, and Cricket Matches on the County Ground in Northlands Road, getting the autographs of famous players and delighting in the big scores often made by Philip Mead and the containment of the opposition batting by Kennedy and Newman. At a later stage I was to play myself on that lovely ground for Newport, Isle of Wight, and for the Hampshire Hogs at club level.

The one experience I always dreaded was the annual Bazaar in the Vicarage garden, which was always opened by a distinguished lady of the County, to whom it was my lot to present a bouquet. This I did by keeping my distance and stretching out my right hand holding the flowers to its fullest extent in fear that I might be kissed by the recipient in front of an admiring crowd. Fortunately it never happened!

The most enduring and precious memory over the years that I still have is of the Services in the Parish Church on Sunday mornings and evenings with the full-throated singing of a large congregation, many of whom became my friends. I attribute my love of the Liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer to that regular spiritual experience, supported by the Authorised Version of the Bible. The many hymns and psalms that we sang together in conjunction with that splendid choir have been absorbed into my system so that when I come across them today I think automatically of Eastleigh Parish Church.

Recently I came across a letter from my father written on 2nd May 1922. Sandwiched in the middle were these words: *“The Eastleigh visit was simply thrilling. I must send you the account in the Eastleigh Weekly News. All Saints was crowded at 3.30 pm and the Parish Church was packed at 6.30 pm. It was an exhausting day, but unforgettable. I celebrated at the High Altar in the Parish Church 8 am, preached at 11 am and 6.30 pm and gave an address at All Saints at 3.30 pm. I went to the west door after every Service to shake hands and it was very tiring. I had to stop shaking hands at night my hand ached so. The people simply leapt at me; it was really very touching.”* All that after an absence of 8 years!

Such was the spirit of Eastleigh and I am sure still is. I can say with the Psalmist, “The lot has fallen unto me in a fair ground: yea, I have a goodly heritage”. For that I shall always be profoundly grateful. Thank you, Eastleigh!

STANLEY THOMPSON  
January 1992

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