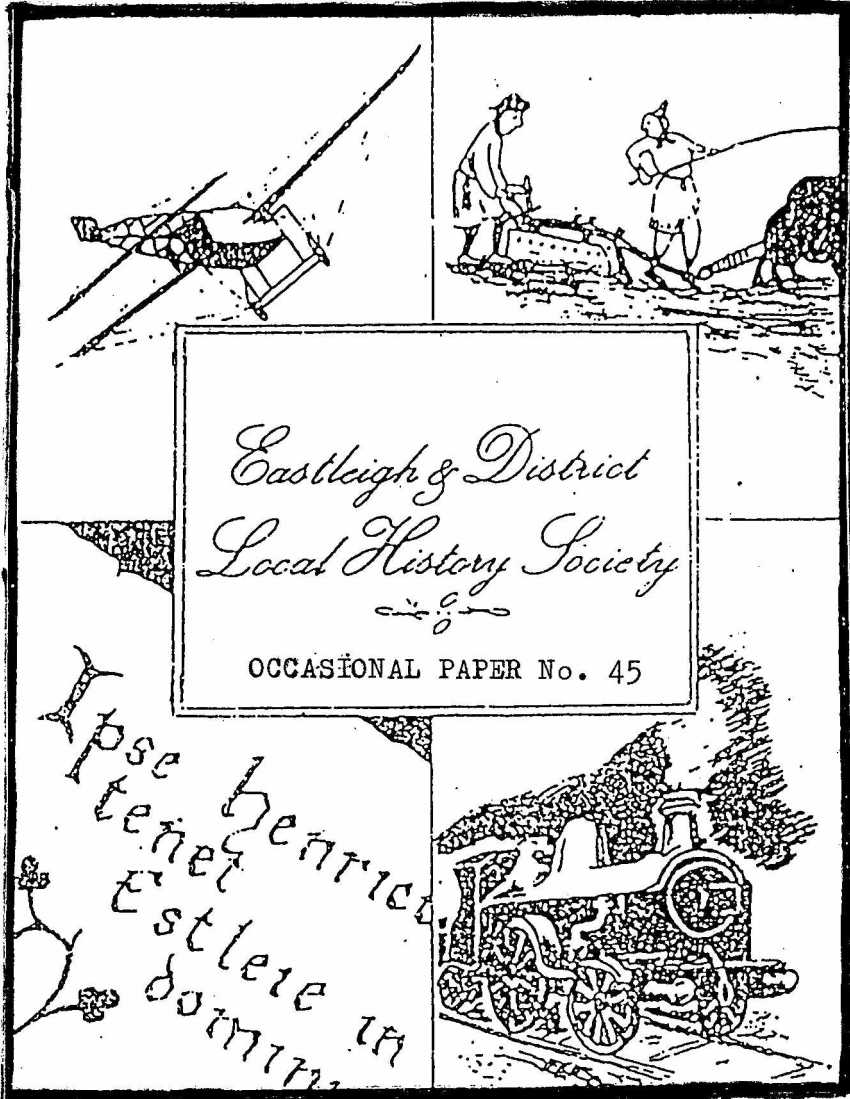


A baker's round in Chandler's Ford, 1917



*Eastleigh & District
Local History Society*

OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 45

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A BAKER'S ROUND IN CHANDLERS FORD, 1917

I was born on the 24th August 1904, at No. 4 Common Road, Chandlers Ford, but the family moved to No. 9 Mount View, Eastleigh, so I started school at Winchester Road Infants with Miss Glanfield as the Headmistress. When I was old enough, I transferred to Chamberlayne Road School where Mr. Whetmore was the Headmaster. In Class I, Mr. Coles was the young student teacher and he used to play the violin in a little orchestra at the old Variety Theatre in Market Street where in those days there were live shows on the stage in the evenings; members of the orchestra also played later during the silent films. In Class II, my teacher was Mr. Hood, who lived in one of the big houses opposite the Town Hall (No. 62, I think); he was a dapper little gentleman with spats and a swagger cane. In Class III, we had Mr. Drewitt, who wrote "*Eastleigh's Yesterdays*" and in Class IV, it was Mr. McGregor, a dour Scotsman. In 1915, we had to move to the Derby Road School because the Chamberlayne Road building was converted into a hospital to cope with the many wounded soldiers coming back from the war. The Government introduced a labour certificate which could be taken in Class IV and if you passed you could leave school. That's what I did.

So I had to look for a job. I found one at Baker & Son, the Gents outfitters on the corner of Market Street and Leigh Road. I worked from 9 in the morning till 6 o'clock in the evening with one hour off for a meal and I earned four shillings and sixpence a week. My duties were to sweep the front of the building with a brush and clean the windows; then to go inside to dust the counters and shelves but without touching any of the goods.

After five weeks, I left and got a job with Brixey's, the well known baker at the time. Mrs. Brixey, a widow, ran the firm which was the biggest in Eastleigh. I earned six shillings and sixpence a week but I had to start at half past seven and go on until the round was finished. First, I had to weigh out the flour - plain or self-raising - and put it into 1 lb. or 2 lb. bags. When that was done and if there was still time before the van was loaded and the horse put in the shafts, I used to go to the confectionary bakehouse where I had to turn doughnuts to make them brown all over. There was a big iron pot about 10 inches deep and 1½ft feet across, full of bubbling fat, heated by gas, and I had a stick about 15 inches long. When the doughnuts were brown all over, I had to call the chief cook and if he was satisfied, I would take them out with a mesh ladle and put them on an empty tray. Then another 12 were put in. That went on until about 10 o'clock when the roundsman was ready with his horse and van and off he went.

Our round was in Chandlers Ford. We turned left out of High Street into Leigh Road which only went as far as the cemetery road before becoming Dew Lane which looked just as it does today. The only alteration I can see is that the lane no longer turns round to where Passfield Avenue is now and there is a footpath at the top of the bank. In my day, it was all open meadows beyond with a track to get to Stoneham. There was just one old farmhouse where a Mrs. White lived and she used to have a loaf a day.

I used to walk down the track and when I got back to the van, we turned off Dew Lane into Woodside Lane where there were three thatched cottages - one where Leigh Road is now and two others spaced out towards the railway. We went under the railway bridge and came to Frith's farm. In front of the farmhouse was a gentleman's big house - I think it as called Eastleigh House. We turned left there into Lovers Lane which went into Oakmount Road. Back to Dew Lane and then sharp left to two houses belonging to Home Farm which we passed next and after about 200 yards, the road turned sharp right for about 20 yards and then sharp left and down a big hump about 18 inches below the normal road level. This was to stop the water in time of flooding from flowing from the stream down into Eastleigh. It sounds unbelievable but it's true. There was a ford to go through, about 6 inches deep in summer but when there was a flood it might be three feet deep and impassable. When this happened, we had to go back as far as Oakmount Road and then up to the Halfway Inn in order to get to Chandlers Ford. But in summertime, the ford was passable for horse drawn traffic and, of course, that's all there was in those days. For people on foot, there was a little bridge just like the ones at Magpie Lane and at Stoneham.

Once through the stream, we went up North End Road. There were only two houses, one on each side of the road. All the way up to Winchester Road, it was open fields. Near the top where the Velmore Estate is now, there was a German prisoner of war camp - pretty grim with high barbed wire all round. In Winchester Road, the only houses were on the left hand side until we reached the Hut Hotel, just past which there was a farm gate with a semi-circular roadway leading to the farmhouse. I had to go up there with a basket and deliver a couple of loaves. If I was lucky they would give me a glass of milk for refreshment. Then I'd go down another semi-circular track which came out onto Winchester Road further on and by that time the van would have arrived there.

We went past the old Chandlers Ford School, which, after it was closed was used as offices by Selwoods but was later pulled down by Pascon. No shops or houses there then but there were two houses in School Lane where we served a Mr. Bunce and a Mr. Hoskin who were related. Back to the main road, over the railway bridge and down to Chandlers Ford Station turning sharp left to reach the Station House.

Back to Hursley Road and the Station Hotel, now renamed Monks Brook Hotel. No more houses until you reached the Ritchie Hall and St. Boniface Church, opposite which were two shops, a butcher's and a greengrocer's. After that, all the houses were on the right and there were no grass verges or pavements. On the other side of the road was a hawthorn hedge to keep the cattle back and open fields for miles and not a house in sight. The first turning on the right was Hill Road which went down to Park Road and on to Winchester Road near the Mount Hotel. The first house on the corner of Hill Road was Bunce's - they hired out traction engines, steam rollers and farm instruments. The next turning was Valley Road which was always flooded and impassable at the bottom; then came Common Road with a bridge to cross the stream but it had been broken down by the floods leaving only a footbridge wide enough for people with prams and small trucks. We couldn't get through with the van. Opposite Common Road were two shops, a general store and an ironmonger's and by the side a little road leading to the Ramalley cemetery.

So we went on, delivering bread at the houses until we reached the Union Workhouse where we had our biggest customer. Every day they took four big sandwich loaves specially made for the inmates and once a week they had two big Genoa cakes with little nuts on top. We couldn't go any further because there was no road - just woods all the way to Hocombe Road. So back we went turning into Hill Road and then left into Park Road, where all the houses were on the left hand side and the Snowball Laundry was on the right. In those days, the last house in Park Road was the Vicarage, where I went with my basket and delivered one loaf every day. The road ended there and on the other side was Cuckoobushes Farm on the Hiltingbury Estate. You couldn't get through to Otterbourne, so back we had to go to Hill Road and turn into Merdon Avenue, a winding road where we served three big houses. On to Winchester Road and turn right to serve our customers at Fernhill which was an isolated community clustered round the Halfway Inn.

After that, we had to go to Otterbourne. No houses after the Mount Hotel except Pitmore Farm which was well off the road where Thronden School is now. The first house we served in Otterbourne was Penarth which had big high gates and a little one for tradesmen. You had to be sure to close that gate when you came out.

We served all the houses near the Cricketers Pub, now called The Otter. There was a little village store - a pokey little place made out of the front room of a house. They only sold the small things you needed. I don't know how people did their main shopping in those days. It's difficult to understand how it's all altered. There was no Pitmore Road - just a private road to The Grange and, about 200 yards off Boyatt Lane, there were three old cottages.

That was the end of our round for the day and we went down the twisting and turning Boyatt Lane to come out at the top of Allbrook Hill near Rookwood House, the former Maternity Home. We went south along Winchester Road as far as the old parish church, turned right, then left into Upper Market Street, right into Leigh Road and finally left into High Street and we were home. We had to unharness the horse, feed and water him, put him away for the night and see that any bread left over was safely stored away.

I had two frightening experiences when I was a Baker's Roundsman. The first was one afternoon when we had to come back from Fryern Hill to Eastleigh along what is now Oakmount Road. When we reached the railway bridge, the long bolt which fastened the shafts to the front of the van broke and the horse went bolting down the hill with the shafts attached. The van with the lady driver and me went on a little way and crashed into the bank at the side of the road. We went halfway down the bank and hit a tree and the bread left in the van came shooting out. I only hurt my ankle a bit so I scrambled up the bank and saw the horse racing towards Home Farm where the shafts got wedged in a narrow opening as he tried to get through.

The other experience was when we had an emergency call and I, aged 13, was given the job of delivering the bread. They gave me a two-wheeled cart, a float I think they called it, where the shafts were higher than usual and you think you are going to fall off backwards. I had to go but I was scared stiff that the thing would collapse and go up in the air. However, I did the job and got back safely. It makes me laugh now when I think that youngsters of 13 are still at school.

I worked at Brixey's for six months. Then I left and got a job at Tyrrel and Green's in Southampton, but that's another story.

JOHN COMPTON

October 1993