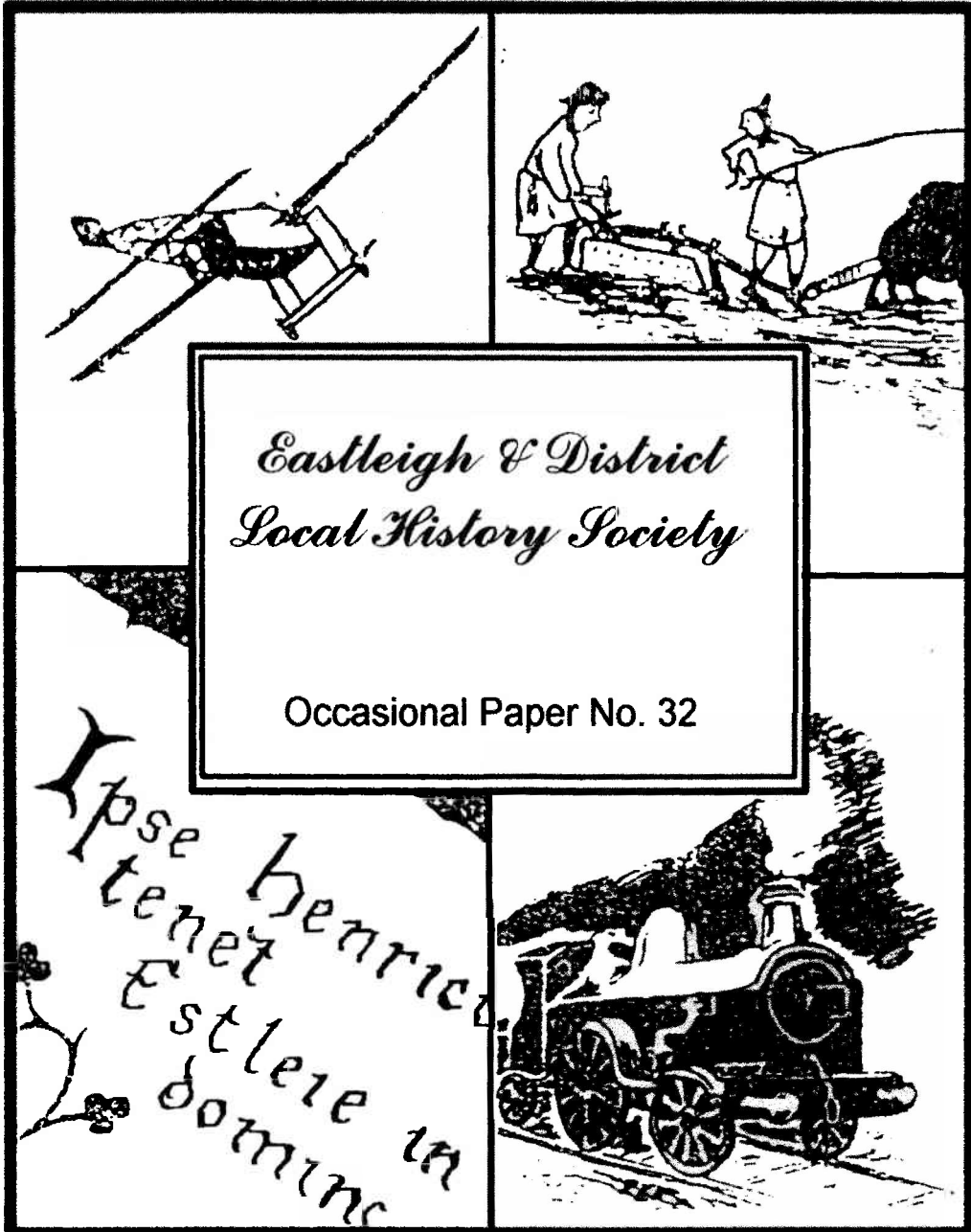


HILTINGBURY ESTATE IN THE WOODS



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LAKESIDE ROAD

### HILTINGBURY ESTATE IN THE WOODS

Hiltingbury Estate in the late 1950s is not, you might think, worthy of a mention in the annals of Eastleigh's history. Not ancient history, perhaps, but history is always in the making. The Hiltingbury now described by journalists and estate agents as 'upmarket' and 'executive belt' is a fair step away from that part of Hiltingbury I moved into early in 1959. It was then a quiet, little known corner of the Borough, thickly wooded with heathland beyond, but it was on the verge of being torn apart and changed beyond recognition.

The initial developers were Noyce & Son. Their early bungalows were of a quite unique design for the period – very attractive from the outside if rather cramped on the inside, and surprisingly inexpensive, even for those days, at £2,300 for a basic bungalow with no extras.

The Estate was eventually to cover the area stretching between the backs of the houses in Lakewood Road and Hursley Road, above Hiltingbury Road.

We were among the first despoilers. We came, nearly all of us, from towns, and were somewhat overawed by our new environs. The first phase of building had just started and there was a small scattering of bungalows in Gordon Road and at the bottom of Nicol Road, but surrounding us on three sides was dense woodland, with towering oak, beech and sweet chestnut trees and thousands of silver birches.

The summer of 1959 remains in my memory as long, hot and back breaking. The sickly sweet scent of woodsmoke drifted persistently about us. The builders cut down and burned just as many trees as were needed to clear their plots and left the house buyers to deal with the remainder. Some of us moved in with trees suffocatingly close to our back windows. No sun, precious little light, could penetrate. It was difficult to eulogise about the beauty of nature as one peered into the gloom. A Council official arrived quickly. He seemed to know all the trees individually, by name, and was determined to rescue as many as possible. He told us what we could, and most definitely could not chop down and we were under orders to leave a sizeable strip of woodland at the bottom of each garden. We were thus initiated into the meaning of the Tree Preservation Order, and, in retrospect I realise how necessary the Order was.

We felled and chopped, where permitted, and lit our bonfires.

Beneath the trees we did not find soil, ready for digging. We found stones. We set up large earth sifters and in every garden the would-be gardeners monotonously hurled stones at their sifters, accumulating large heaps of the wretched things on one side and painfully small heaps of soil on the other. Then, in the dark of the night, came the sound of trundling and squeaking wheelbarrows, transferring the stones by stealth to some other, as yet undeveloped building plot.

All through that summer of heat and hard work our homes were invaded by huge, buzzing flies. Some people blamed the fallen trees, but others the Council's refuse tip at the western end of Hiltingbury Road, but wherever they came from they were most unpleasant.

I have never discovered who lived in the camp on the corner of Hursley Road and Hook Road. The late Capt. A. A. J. Fortune, in his book on the growth of Chandlers Ford mentioned a prisoner of war camp at Hiltingbury. Could it have been that, I wonder? Or was it an army camp? It had almost disappeared by 1959, but the gardens remained. Wildly overgrown, but still recognisable, they had obviously been

cherished. Frequent sorties were made to that campsite by newcomers to the Estate and some lovely plants and shrubs re-appeared in our gardens.

The majority of us were young and hard up. We were not two-car families. We either had one, often an 'old banger' or no car at all. Many had babies and young children, and in the aftermath of settling in the women began to suffer from their unaccustomed isolation. It was a paradise for the children, with large gardens, beautiful woods still only a few steps away, but although we weren't all that far from civilisation, as the crow flew, the mothers felt cut off. We were barely aware that we lived in the Borough of Eastleigh. Few of us had ever been there and we had no linking bus service. There was, though, even then, an hourly Hants & Dorset bus to and from Southampton. The green bus, usually one that had seen better days, bumped and heaved its way along Hiltingbury Road (which was unmade from Lakewood Road westward) until it reached its turning point at the entrance to the deserted Polish camp, which is now the entrance to the recreation ground. In bad weather the bus had to struggle through thick mud and often gave up by the time it reached Nicol Road. And now we complain about potholes in the tarmac!

However, a bus journey is not lightly undertaken when you have a babe in arms, a toddler, a pushchair, or all three, so we townswomen had to learn to adjust.

Our nearest shops, grocer, post office and newsagent, were on the corner of Kingsway because that section of Hiltingbury was already built up. The grocer, Mr. Smith, collected our orders and delivered our goods, a mobile greengrocery shop called on us every Friday night (and by the time it reached us the produce was far from fresh!) and butchers came in from Hursley and Twyford. When the urge to 'see life' overcame us, as it did frequently, we made our way on foot, pushing our prams, up to the few small shops at Fryern Hill (after a time, one of these, opposite Brownhill Road, became Chandlers' Ford's first public library) or else to The Parade in Bournemouth Road. There we had an excellent draper, Mr. Arthur Dews, who fitted out our children with clothes from top to toe. Opposite, we actually had a Co-op, in the shop now occupied by Wainwright's Travel Agency.

Our mother and baby clinic was in the Ritchie Hall and it was run by Dr. Yates, a lady doctor, who had small twin girls and lived in Pine Road. The walk to the clinic, so that our latest offspring could experience the joys of vaccination and immunisation, was quite an outing. We went via Pine Road which was bordered by high banks of rhododendrons and was a magnificent sight in the springtime. The bunny fields, or bunny woods as they are still called by the locals, had a seat which made a pleasant resting place. A memorial stone stands there, facing Forest Road, bearing the inscription 'this open space was dedicated to the public in memory of Marion Elizabeth Kennedy - 1958'. A thoughtful gift. Was it once her garden I wonder, or did she too know it as the Bunny Woods? Mr. Billen's bungalow, also in Pine Road was a regular port of call. He kept chickens and sold eggs and it was a great temptation hit with the children who called him 'The Egg Man'.

I have been browsing through my cherished 1958 Kelly's Directory. What a pity that they stopped publishing them; they make such interesting reading. I see that when the 1950 edition was compiled there were two nursery gardens at the top of Park Road and one in Common Road, run by a Mr. Gotham, who lived in Rose Cottage. His house is still there, but his nursery is now Common Gardens. There were only about 2,000 houses in the whole of Chandlers Ford, fewer than there are now in the electoral roll of Hiltingbury West, which includes the Estate. Velmore and Springhill had just

begun, but Hiltingbury, Peverells Wood, Scantabout and Oakmount Estates had not yet put in an appearance.

In 1958 the land supported several farms, but they have gradually disappeared. The last to go was John Vining's Hiltonbury Farm with its duck pond and strutting peacocks shrieking around the farmhouse. The lowing of cows was a familiar sound then in Hiltingbury. That farm has now been replaced by yet another Estate, Miller's Dale, but fortunately the farmhouse remains, although converted into a public house.

I also note that there was only one school in Chandlers Ford in 1958 and it catered for juniors as well as infants. It was no picnic for the mothers of Hiltingbury Estate to get their infants to King's Road nor later to the new junior school to be built in Merdon Avenue. We launched a campaign for a school bus and, to our amazement, we won.

I remember that in those days we only had double deckers, with no doors, and for our part of the bargain we had to supply for each journey a mother who had to stand on the running board and make sure none of the children fell off. Spurred on by our success, we campaigned for our own infants school to be built on the newly laid out recreation ground and to be followed by the junior school. A Hiltingbury Residents Association was formed, flickering briefly into action and achievement before fading away.

The woods as I first knew them retreated as houses, roads and shops advanced. The popularity of Hiltingbury as a 'desirable residential area' grew. The price of houses rocketed and plot sized decreased dramatically as semi-detached and terraced houses, even flats, sprang up. Only a few of the early settlers have stayed on, but others still live in the Borough. Many of our children have put down roots locally and regard themselves as natives of Eastleigh. They probably take for granted all the amenities with which they are now blessed and may not even remember how different life was on Hiltingbury Estate such a short time ago.

Freda Molyneux.  
September 1987.



QUEEN'S ROAD