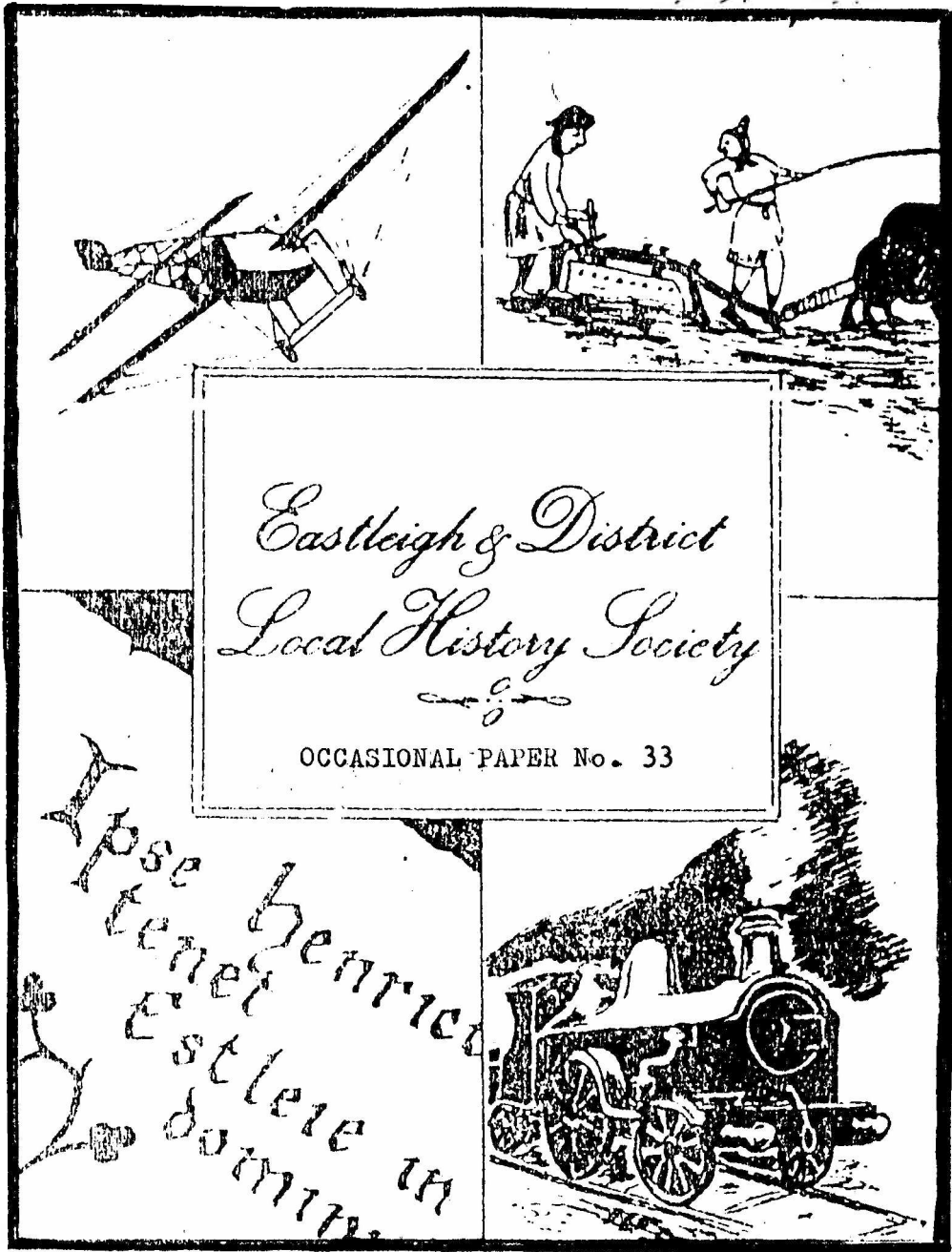


Wartime dances at Eastleigh Town Hall 1940-41.



# Silver Wings in the MOONLIGHT

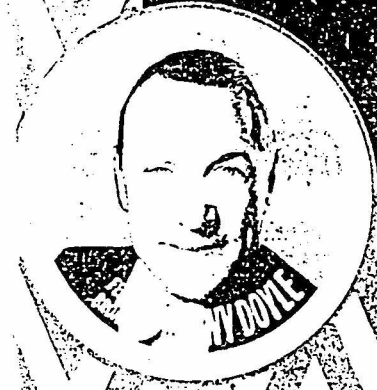
*Words & Music by Hugh Charles, Leo Towers & Sonny Miller*



IRVIN DASH MUSIC CO. LTD. 17 BERNERS ST. LONDON W.1.

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NET

**SHINE  
ON  
VICTORY MOON**



LYRIC BY SONNY MILLER  
**ROSANNA**  
MUSIC BY HANS MAY

FROM THE GAINSBOROUGH PICTURE  
**MADONNA OF THE  
SEVEN MOONS!**

STARRING  
PHYLLIS CALVERT  
STEWART GRANGER  
& PATRICIA ROC



*in the  
Universal  
Picture*

**ROOKIES!**

## WARTIME DANCES AT EASTLEIGH TOWN HALL, 1940 -1941

The most popular dance hall had been in Southampton but after its destruction by a landmine early in the war and because of the risk of nightly raids on large towns, Eastleigh became the centre for dancing and developed into a popular social venue attracting young people from miles around. Deprived of peacetime pleasures, they flocked to the dances in great numbers. Eastleigh was a small town from which it was easier to escape into the countryside when the sirens sounded and the 'thump-thump' of German bombers passing overhead made everyone wonder which town it was to be tonight.

The old Town Hall still looks much the same as always but internally major alterations and extensions have been made, particularly in the area of the former Council Chamber and it has been dubbed with name of "The Point". When it was built, it was up-to-date and attractive with its well sprung floor for dances and other functions. Dances were held there six times a week, the most popular nights being Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Some were in aid of various good causes such as Wings For Victory, Aid To China and Mrs. Churchill's Aid To Russia Fund. They started at 7.00 and finished at 11.00p.m. or earlier if a heavy raid developed, in which case the hall was cleared. People living nearby would run home and others would go to the shelters, remaining there until it was safe to leave. I remember once going with a girl friend to her home and together we stood at her bedroom window to watch Southampton go up in flames.

The young people who attended the dances regularly were mainly sailors, Wrens, airmen from the Fleet Air Arm base at the airfield or from the Balloon Barrage sites (these tended to be older as they were in the R.A.F.V.R.), civilian girls and a few civilian men. Some of the Servicemen were Regulars but mostly they were civilians in uniform, now living in dreary, comfortless barrack rooms. A lot of different nationalities passed through the small town and duly appeared at the dances but they did not stay in the area for long. After the evacuation from Dunkirk, the Free French arrived, then came the Canadians but they too moved on after a few weeks. These interlopers were rather resented by the boys who went to the dances regularly; they were too popular with the girls since their uniforms were smarter and they had better manners.

Note:- R.A.F.V.R.... Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

On account of wartime restrictions on large gatherings, the number of people admitted to the dances was limited. It was necessary to come and join the queue early in the hope of getting in before the doors were closed and no one else allowed in. Service people were given priority and paid only 9d instead of the 1/6 for civilians.

Two bands played on alternate nights and at the interval there was a buffet, but no alcohol was served. The dance floor was excellent and well sprung; how it suffered from the hobnail boots! At that time, even service girls had to have hobnails in their shoes.

A lot of local girls were on war work and earning good wages; the service girls envied the civilian girls in their pretty dresses and their long hair, since they could only wear civilian clothes when on leave and their hair had to be off the collar - no long page-boy bobs allowed!

The music was either sweet and romantic for waltzes and foxtrots or gay and lively for quicksteps and novelty dances such as the Palais Glide and the Hokey Cokey. Some titles were Moonlight Madonna, Fools Rush In, All The Things You Are and the song made famous by Vera Lynn, We'll Meet Again. The last waltz was always danced to Who's Taking You Home Tonight? and signalled a rush to the cloakrooms to retrieve gas mask and steel helmet without which no service man or woman dare be seen outside.

Among the girls who attended the dances regularly was an Army girl whose home was three miles from the town. She used to cycle to and fro with gas mask and helmet fastened behind the saddle and if there was flak about when she left to ride home she wore her steel helmet. She was so keen on the dances that when her cycle was out of action, she would go in by bus and walk home or get a lift in any army vehicle which happened to be going her way.

This Army girl got to know many of the boys and girls who went regularly to the dances and amongst them was a plump, jolly Wren, who was always surrounded by a group of sailors; it was rumoured that she actually drank pints with the boys!

Note:- flak.... pieces of metal shrapnel from bursting shells.

Another girl was Ruby, older than most, about thirty, tall and willowy, but not pretty and quite sophisticated in the eyes of the younger girls who did not consider her at all attractive and could not understand why she was so popular among the men, never being left sitting among the wallflowers. One night, as the Army girl was sitting out with a boy she knew, Ruby danced past and was overheard to be discussing money with her R.A.F. partner, the significance of which was not realised by the Army girl until long after.

Most of the girls went to the dances in pairs or groups and stayed together except when dancing, the girls on one side and the boys on the other side of the hall. They went home together too unless they had special boy friends and there was a code that most girls kept to - Dance with the married men but don't date them.

Eastleigh railway station was an important junction where service people often had to change trains, frequently spending many dreary hours of waiting by day or night. For this reason, the buffet stayed open very late and it became the custom for Town Hall dancers to go there for a cup of char before going home.

For two years, the Army girl went to dances at the Town Hall and she saw many familiar faces amongst the boys disappear from the scene. Mostly, the girls remained and as time went by, they brought their younger sisters with them. They all worked hard at their wartime occupations, burning the candle at both ends. Many romances blossomed at these dances, often leading to marriage, although a lot of service men were reluctant to marry during wartime. The future was too uncertain and there was the risk of a posting overseas, perhaps ending up in a prisoner of War camp and eventually returning to find themselves married to a stranger or, indeed, not returning at all. However, there were girls who married men in the Services and settled in the town after their husbands returned. They are probably still there, doubtless grandmothers by now. When they pass the old Town Hall, do they sometimes feel a pang as they remember the dancing days of their youth and the Ships That Passed In The Night?

Marguerite Gorman

October 1988

Marguerite Gorman

THE OLD TOWN HALL, EASTLEIGH

WAR TIME DANCES, PERIOD 1940--- 1941.

Written

1984.

At the time it was built it was up to date, and served its purpose well, housing the Council offices, and with an attractively decorated hall with a well sprung floor for dances and other functions.

After many years the once small quiet town had grown, the Town Hall had become too small, and had been superseded by a large modern structure some distance away.

Now the smart red brick had faded, it looked run down and shabby. Ah, but what stories it could have told, it too had had its moment of glory, but no medals are awarded to buildings for meritorious war service.

The most popular dance hall had been in Southampton, but early in the war it had been destroyed by a land mine.

It was risky to go into Southampton after dark at this time, since the Germans had started their regular nightly raids, so despite the danger of large gatherings, Eastleigh became the popular place for dancing, and soon became the recognised social centre for young people from miles around. Deprived of peace time pleasures they flocked to the dances in great numbers.

In a small town it was easier to escape from the streets into the country, one always felt safer on a country road than in a street when the raids started.

That Autumn and winter, as soon as darkness fell, the sirens would go, and we would hear the steady thump, thump, of the German bombers passing overhead. We would exchange glances, the same thoughts in all our minds 'Who is going to catch it tonight, Pompey? Bristol? Southampton?

THE OLD TOWN HALL, EASTLEIGH.(2)

Dances were held at the Town Hall six nights a week, the most popular nights being Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Some dances were held in aid of various good causes, such as 'Wings for Victory' 'Aid to China', and Mrs. Churchill's Aid to Russia fund.

They started at 7 p m and finished at 11 p.m. or earlier if a heavy raid developed, in which case the hall was cleared, people that lived near would run home, others to the shelters, until it was safe to leave. On one such occasion I went with a girl friend to her house nearby, and together we stood at her bedroom window in the darkness, and watched Southampton going up in flames.

The young people that attended the dances regularly were mainly sailors, wrens and airmen from H.M.S. Raven, the Fleet Air Arm base nearby, airmen from the Balloon Barrage sites, who tended to be older as they were from the R.A.F.V.R., civilian girls, but few civilian men.

Some of the service men were regulars, but mainly they were civilians in uniform for the duration, living in dreary comfortless barrack rooms.

At the Town Hall dances there was warmth, light, and gaiety, for a few brief hours they could forget the drabness of their daily lives, and the depressing war news, which at that time was going badly for us. And so we danced the nights away, putting aside thoughts of what tomorrow might bring.

A lot of different nationalities passed through the small town, and duly appeared at the dances, but did not stay in the area long. After Dunkirk the Free French arrived, ~~and duly~~ ~~but did not stay long~~. Next the Canadians, they too moved on after a few weeks. These interlopers were rather resented by the boys who went to the dances regularly, they were too popular with the girls, since their uniforms were smarter and they had better manners.



Eastleigh Town Hall

Due to wartime restrictions on large gatherings, numbers to be admitted to the dances were limited. It was necessary to get there early, queue, and hope to get in before the doors were closed and no more were allowed in. Service people were given priority and only paid 9d entry instead of 1/6 that civilians paid.

Two bands played on alternate nights, and at the interval there was a buffet, but no alcohol served. It was an excellent dance floor, well sprung, how it suffered from the hobnail boots! at that time/ even service girls were forced to wear hobnails in their shoes.

A lot of local girls were on war work, and earning good wages, the service girls envied the civilians their pretty dresses and long hair, since they could only wear civilian dress when on leave, and hair had to be off the collar, no long page boy bobs allowed!

The music was either sweet and romantic for waltzes and foxtrots, or gay and lively for quicksteps and novelty dances such as the 'Palais Glide and the 'Honey Cokey'. 'Moonlight Madonna' 'Fools Rush In' 'All the Things You Are' and the song made famous by Vera Lynn, 'We'll Meet Again' and many more. The last Waltz was always danced to 'Who's Taking You Home Tonight' and signalled a rush to the cloak rooms to retrieve gas mask and steel helmets that no service man or woman would dare to be seen without.

Amongst the girls who attended the dances regularly was an Army girl, whose home was three miles from the town, she cycled to and from the dances, with gas mask and helmet fastened behind the saddle, if there was flak about when she left to ride home, she wore her steel helmet. When her bicycle was out of action, she would go by 'bus, and walk home, or get a lift from any army vehicle going her way.

The Army girl got to know many of the boys and girls who went to the dances regularly, amongst them was a plump, jolly Wren, who was always surrounded by a group of sailors, it was rumoured that she actually drank pints with the boys!

Another girl, older than most, was Ruby, she was around thirty, tall and willowy, but not pretty, she was never sitting with the wallflowers. She seemed very sophisticated to the younger girls, they did not think her attractive

EASTLEIGH TOWN HALL(4)

and could not understand why she was so popular with the men.

On a night when the Army girl was sitting out with an R.A.F. boy she knew, Ruby danced past.. The R.A.F. boy whispered into the ear of his companion, "5/- is the price I hear". For a moment she did not realise what he meant, and when she did was shocked that he should think such a thing, let alone put it into words.

Most of the girls went to the dances in pairs or groups, and stayed together except when dancing, girls on one side of the hall, boys on the other. They went home together unless they had special boy friends, and had a code that most girls kept to, dance with the married men, but don't date them.

The Railway station at Eastleigh was an important junction. Many service people had to change trains there, and spent weary hours waiting for trains, by day and night, because of this the buffet stayed open very late, and it was the custom to go there for a cup of 'char' before going home.

For two years the Army girl went to the dances at the Town Hall, and saw many familiar faces amongst the boys disappear from the scene. The girls remained and as time went by brought with them their younger sisters, now old enough to go dancing. They worked hard at their wartime occupations, and burnt the candle at both ends.

Many romances blossomed at the Town Hall dances, and many led to marriage, tho' a lot of service men were reluctant to marry in wartime. The future was too uncertain, marriage risky, when they could be posted overseas at any moment, perhaps to end up in a P.O.W. camp for the duration, returning home to find themselves married to a stranger, or not returning at all.

Many girls married men in the Services, after the war their husbands returned, and settled in the town, and are probably still living there. They will be Grandmothers now.

As they pass the old Town Hall, do they sometimes feel a pang, as they remember the dancing days of their youth, and the 'Ships that Passed in the Night!'

IN U.K.

23, SPOTS HILL

EROXLEY GREEN

RIKHMANSWORTH

HERTS. ~~3AE 3AD~~ 3WD 3AE

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(c)