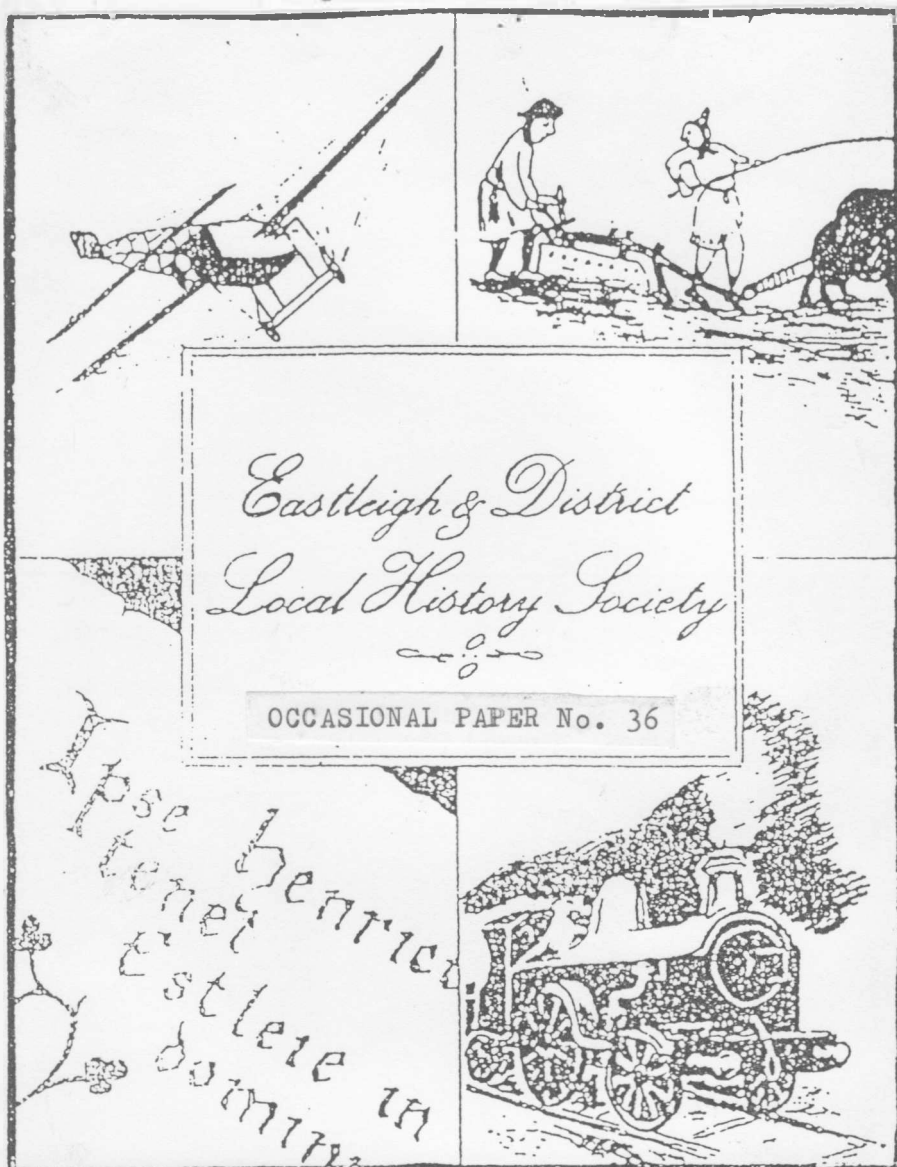


My first job.

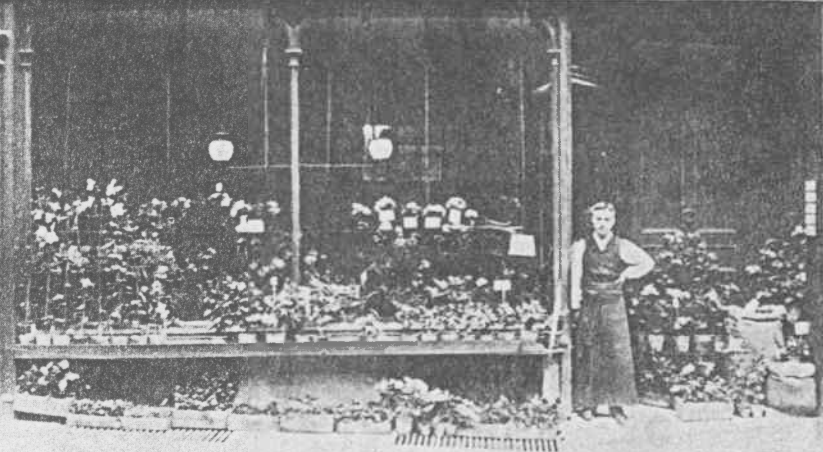


Eastleigh & District
Local History Society

OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 36



22 NURSERY SEED HILLER & FLORAL DEPOT 95



Telephones: 697 & 698.



Telegrams.
Hilliers. Nurserymen. Winchester.



Nurserymen, Seedsmen,
Garden Architects
and Floral Artists.

West Hill Nurseries,

WINCHESTER.

In your reply please quote date
and reference. ARH/WGB.

14th. September. 1938.

Alan House,
17, Monks Road,
Winchester.

Dear Alan,

With reference to your application for the position vacant in our No. 1 Nursery Office, we shall be pleased to have you start with us as soon as possible.

If you agree to work for us for the weekly wage of 8/- per week to start with please write a letter to Mr. A. R. Hillier and say that you agree to these terms.

We have been in communication with the Director of Education re your exemption for School and he reports that you should obtain the necessary papers for exemption from Mr. Lockwood and you should have same duly signed by us etc., and you should take them to the Education Office, 3, The Square, and give them to Mr. Jacob. You will then have to be examined by the Doctor and if he passes you as being fit we feel sure the Director of Education will give you exemption to start with us at once.

Trusting you will favour Mr. A. R. Hillier with your letter at an early date,

We beg to remain,

Yours faithfully,

pp. HILLIER & SONS.

MY FIRST JOB

After watching on 20th October, on BBC 2 TV, "A Living Antique", about Hilliers of Winchester, I was prompted to put pen to paper and record some of my own recollections about my first job with the firm in 1938. I was 15 years old and due, somewhat reluctantly, to leave St Thomas Church of England Boys' School, Winchester, where I had spent four happy years.

My father, after being unemployed for a time, due mainly to the depression of the 1930s, had been employed on several manual and 'dirty' jobs, so on the advice of my mother, who wanted me to have a 'clean' job, I duly applied for the position of junior clerk with Hilliers. With trepidation, I attended the interview at the shop premises, 95 High Street, Winchester. There I met Mr Arthur Hillier, who, with his brother Edwin and his son Harold, ran the business which consisted of the shop, two nurseries in Winchester, and others at Ampfield, Chandlers Ford and Eastleigh.

'Mr Arthur', as he was known, explained the job to me which was in the head office at the West Hill Nursery. The hours of work were 8.30am till 5pm, Monday to Friday and 8.30am till 1pm on Saturday - a total of 42 hours, excluding one hour for lunch - at a wage of eight shillings per week. Two of my friends who had also started their first jobs were earning ten shillings per week and I suggested to 'Mr Arthur' that I would like an extra two shillings. He replied that he could not increase his original offer but stated that if I made good he would pay me ten shillings per week after one month. The fact that I would be having Saturday afternoons off, which would allow me to play football with my friends, and that the job was a 'clean' one, persuaded me to accept the position, which I started on 10th October, 1938.

The offices, an all male domain, were a very pleasant environment and a cycle ride of a mile and a half from where I lived. In the main office there was the chief clerk, two copy typists and two shorthand typists earning between 35 shillings and 50 shillings per week. Mr. Edwin Hillier and his son Harold (HG) had their own separate offices, while I shared a very small office, a wooden annexe, with a lad one year older than me.

One of my duties was to operate the switchboard of three main incoming lines and several internal lines. A handle had to be turned and a plug held down in order to contact the extensions. I was quite scared of this machine at first but I soon mastered it with the help of my workmate John.

I helped to open the early morning post and sort it for distribution. This was, I remember, surprisingly large and letters were received from many parts of the world. I was able to enlarge my stamp collection from the foreign stamps taken from the used envelopes. I did not know then that the firm was internationally well known for its wide range of trees and shrubs. I had to do a vast amount of filing of invoices and correspondence and writing out labels of the botanical names of plants. As soon as I finished one job there was always another one to follow. Never a spare moment!

After four weeks I duly received my first wage increase to ten shillings per week and two months later it was raised to 12 shillings and sixpence per week. However, from then on I had to arrive at the office at 8am to do half an hour's dusting as there were no office cleaners. Looking back, I suppose one would now consider this to be slave labour but everyone seemed to accept their conditions of service without the discontent sometimes met today.

Through my subsequent clerical career I realised that my first year with the firm was good training. The meaning of hard work and those early experiences benefited me later on. The summer months were somewhat slacker in the office but that did not mean less work for us. During the summer of 1939, in between office duties, I was given the job of watering tomatoes and peaches in the green houses - something I quite enjoyed.

Working with the outdoor staff was another useful and beneficial experience. They seemed quite content with their lot in spite of low pay for some of them. Their knowledge of horticulture and botanical names amazed and fascinated me. My own knowledge was beginning to grow and I am sure my experience helped me develop an interest and love of gardening and horticulture.

Hilliers had a cricket club which played local sides and I became a regular member of the team. The annual staff cricket match between the married men and the single men was an event looked forward to as tea was provided afterwards. The match was played on the playing fields of West Down school, adjacent to the nursery. Sadly, the school was recently closed for good. Playing on the single men's side, I was thrilled to make top score, about 50, and we won the match. I understand a staff cricket match is still held but with ladies taking part too.

Growing plants from seeds obtained at the nursery became a hobby of mine. In my garden I have a tree grown from seed which is now 50 years old. The name of it is *Pinus Leucodermis* and I treasure this living association with my early working life at Hilliers, who this year celebrate their 125th year in business.

In September 1939, after 12 months with the firm, my wages were increased to 16 shillings per week. I still possess the wage packet. However, in December of that year I contracted a serious illness which brought a premature end to my first job.

ALAN HOUSE

October 1989

