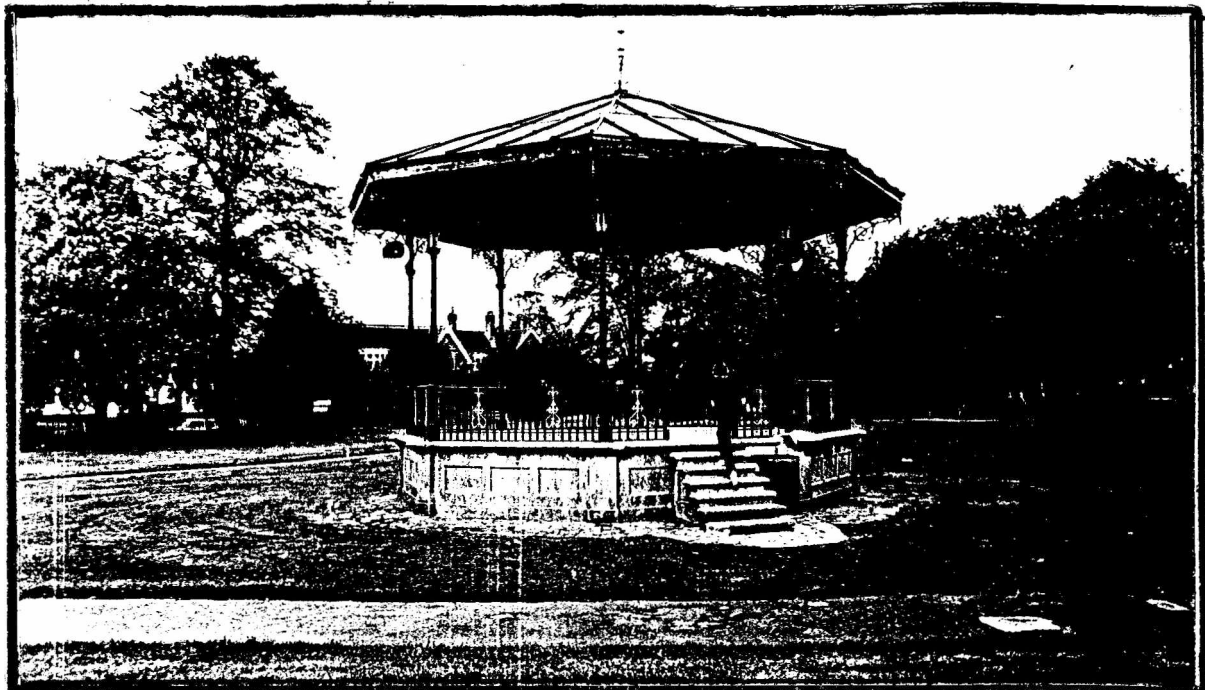
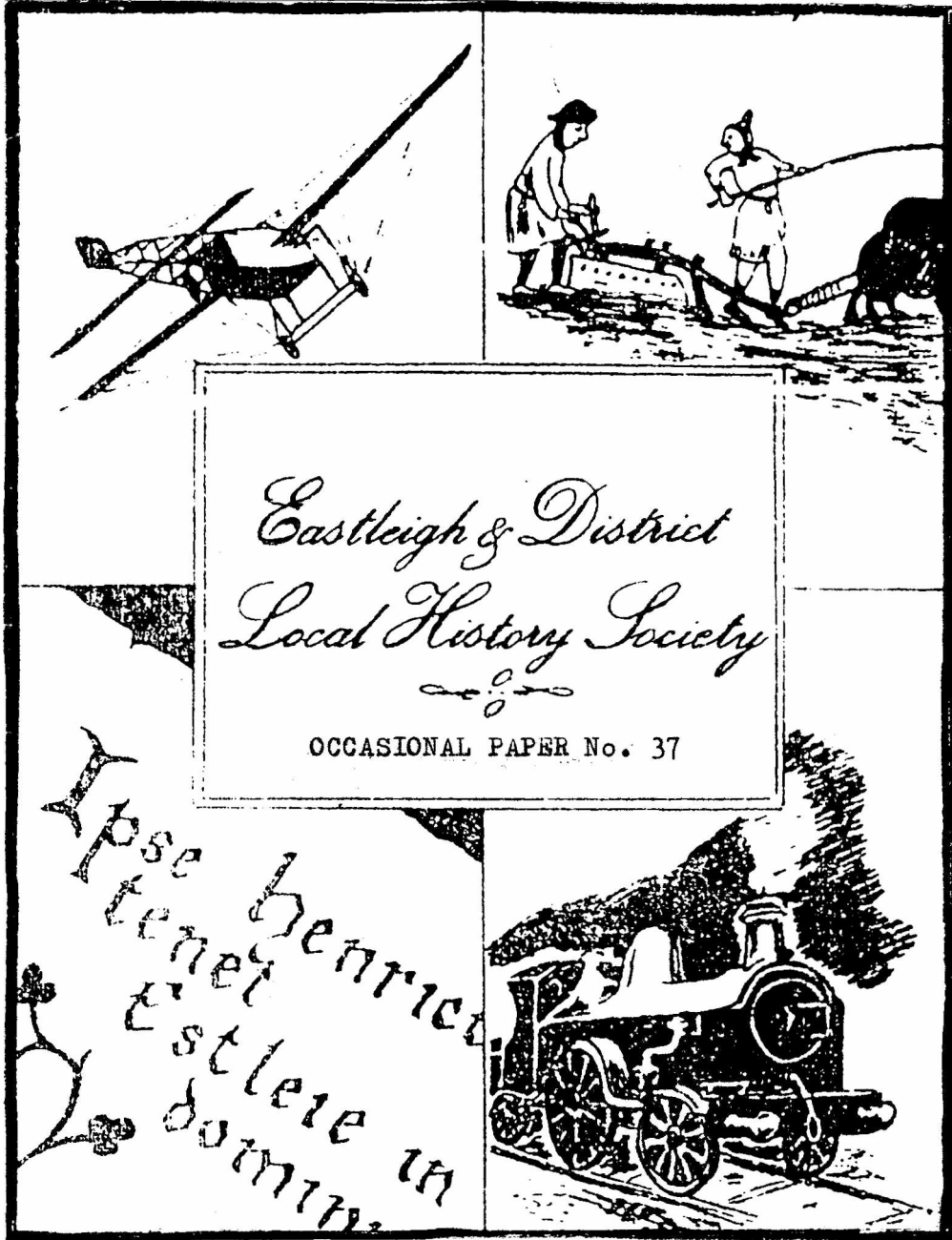
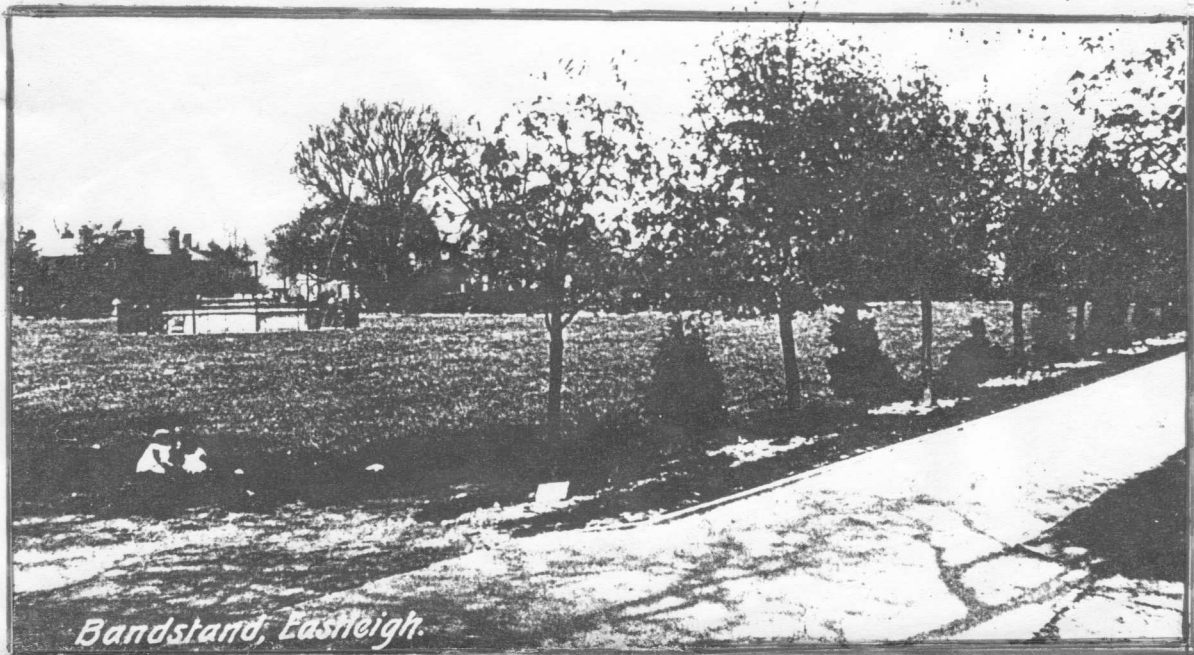
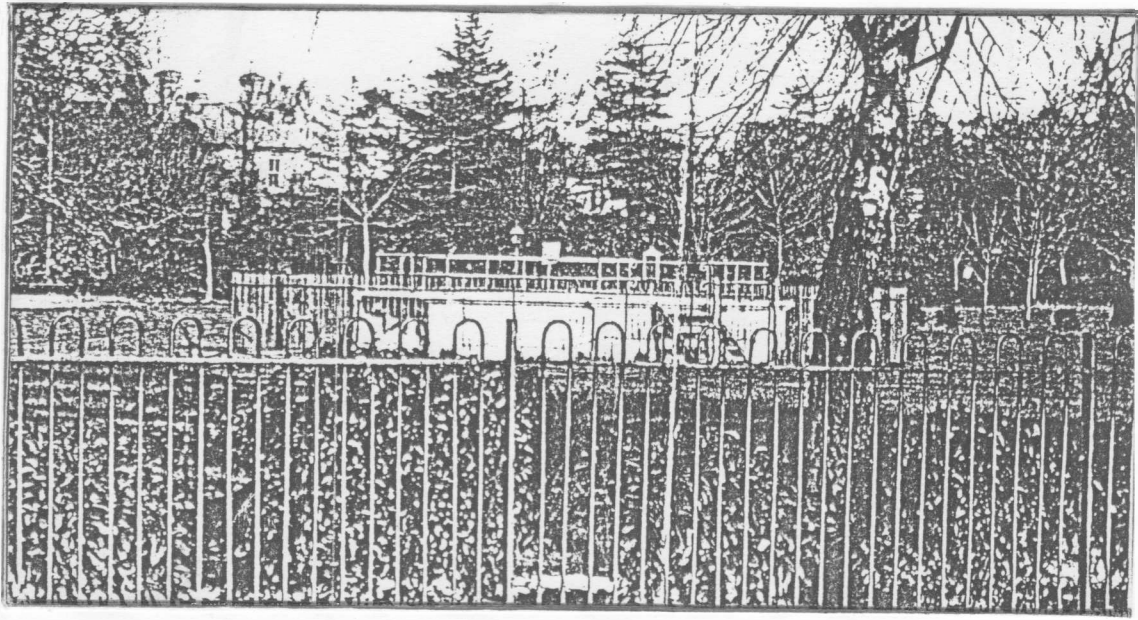
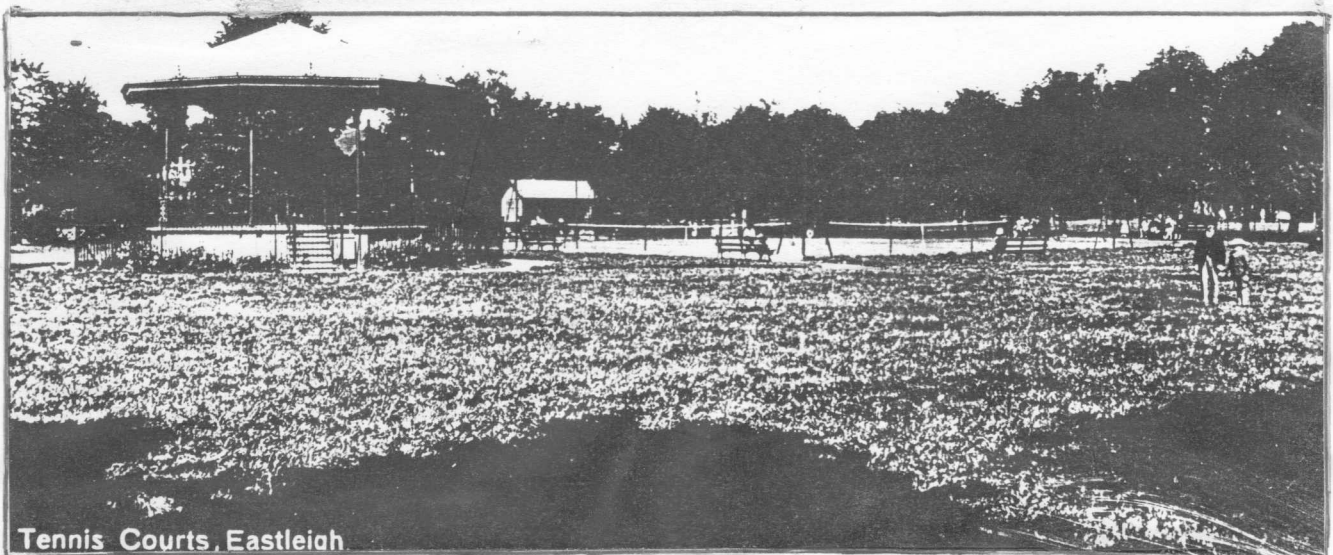


Eastleigh's Bandstand.





Bandstand, Eastleigh.



Tennis Courts, Eastleigh

EASTLEIGH'S BANDSTAND

Southampton once had a bandstand. It was situated in what is now called Palmerston Park about midway between Above Bar and Palmerston Road, quite near New Road. The slight rise on which it stood can still be detected. It disappeared at some time after the beginning of the Second World War and it is amazing that nobody seems to know when, why or how it was demolished. The rumour is spreading that it came to Eastleigh. This is not true and to put an end to such misinformation an explanation should now be given of the origins of the bandstand in our Recreation Ground. There is positive proof that it is a thoroughbred Eastleigh creation.

The story of the setting up of the Eastleigh and Bishopstoke Urban District Council is told in the book by Norman Norris, copies of which may be seen in local libraries. The early Council was formed of a group of intelligent and prudent people who were eager to make the new town into an attractive place in which to live. The immediate improvements - road surfacing, sewage plant, street lighting, tree planting, entertainment - are well documented but less has been written about the welfare and amenities that were provided in those early days, such as the Railway Institute with facilities for library, technical studies, dancing and theatrical performances and the acquisition of a Recreation Ground in the town centre, where it was hoped to erect a bandstand.

In those early days, there is a Council Minute, dated 1st June 1899, which refers to a resolution of the General Purposes Committee, stating: *"The Committee having discussed the question of erecting a Band Stand resolved that while considering the same most desirable yet felt it was more or less in the nature of a luxury and that the matter stand over for the present to ascertain probable cost and whether the same could not be arranged by voluntary contribution. Resolved further to recommend that beyond insisting that sacred music be played on Sundays, the arrangements and performances of the Band be left to the discretion of the Bandmaster but not waiving any of the powers of the Authority should anything occur to cause the Council to intervene."*

The Chairman of the Council at that date was Mr. William Panter, who was also Superintendent of the Carriage Works. It is obvious that he used his influence to persuade the Directors of the London and South Western Railway Company to make the voluntary contribution hoped for by members of the General Purposes Committee. In an issue of the Eastleigh Weekly News dated 3rd August 1900, it is reported that:

“It has become a matter of history that the directors of the L&SWR were, through the overtures of W. Panter, Esq., persuaded to show their sympathy with the Works Band in a practical manner by placing on the recreation ground at their own expense a band stand on which from time to time the band could perform to the enjoyment of the public. The erection has now been completed, at least so far as the stand proper is concerned, and a substantial structure it is. Massive iron columns bedded in concrete cement form the staple foundation, and around these are bolted together thick slabs, of which also the floor is composed. The outside is a varnished matchboard, with top and bottom moulding, and around the stand is carried a substantial iron two-bar railing. The company propose later on to place around the fence an iron unclimbable fence and also to cover it, so that it will become much more attractive.”

In accepting the gift, Mr. H. Willmer, stationmaster and now Chairman of the Council, expressed his hope that the public would respect the stand and see that children didn't damage it. Other speakers too seemed to be worried about possible ill treatment of the new stand. Nevertheless, it was not until May 1903, that the Council resolved to have a fence erected, at a cost of £22.

One has to speculate on the nature of the thick slabs of which the floor of the bandstand was said to be composed. There are people still alive who remember playing on it and they all confirm that there was a wooden flooring. A number of photographs exist showing this bandstand without a roof, the fitting of which seems to have been delayed indefinitely. One also has to consider whether the original bandstand was of the substantial nature reported in the Press, because there is a Council Minute of 29th April 1909, stating: *“The Committee recommend that a concrete stand be provided in the Park for band playing, 30 yards to the East of the present structure, at an estimated cost of about £30, such stand to be so constructed as to be available for a complete covered Band Stand in the near future, and that the sum be paid for out of current rate.”*

Presumably this new stand was erected without delay because the following year, there is a Minute concerning the provision of a cover ending with the words: *“but it was resolved not to proceed further in the matter on account of the cost.”* A year later, on 9th March 1911, a Minute reads: *“The Committee considered the question of completing the Band Stand. It was resolved that a Band Committee be appointed to consider the whole question of the Band arrangements.”* We come to 1913 before there is further mention of the proposed roof. A Minute dated 12th June 1913 states: *“The question of providing a cover to the band stand was considered but the Committee (of the whole Council) have no recommendation to make at present.”*

War broke out in 1914 and no further reference to the project is found for many years. However, the stand must have been popular and well used because Minutes frequently refer to applications for bands to play in the Recreation Ground, the conditions to be applied and the type of music. Of course, one has to remember that the whole of the ground was covered with wooden huts during World War I to provide temporary hospital accommodation for wounded troops returning from the battlefields of France.

Eventually, on 8th February 1923, the Council decided to act. A Minute states: "*The question of providing a Cover to the Band Stand was discussed, and the Surveyor was instructed to obtain and submit estimates for consideration.*" Later that year, on 28th June, it was reported that eleven tenders and designs for cover to the bandstand had been submitted and it was resolved "*to recommend that the tender of Messrs. David Rowell and Co. Ltd. of London, for the sum of £322, be accepted, subject to arrangements being made for payment for same in October, in order that the cost may be provided for in the next half year's estimate.*" The firm seems to have agreed.

In its issue of 19th October 1923, the Eastleigh Weekly News commented that: "*Work is now in operation with providing the bandstand with a new cover. Doubtless the Council will soon consider the advisability of making the surroundings a little more attractive; otherwise the beautiful bandstand will look somewhat out of harmony with the other appearance of the ground generally.*" Apparently, the Council heeded the remarks in the Eastleigh Weekly News and took steps to improve the general appearance of the area. In June 1925, they even invited tenders for lighting the Bandstand by electricity and on 16th July 1925, it was resolved: "*To recommend that the tender of the Cray Installations Ltd. for £19. 17. 9. be accepted.*"

So we can conclude that the Bandstand which exists in the Recreation Ground as we know it today took 24 years to complete, the base being built in 1909 and the roof put on in 1923. It is also clear from Council Minutes, reports in the columns of the Eastleigh Weekly News and plentiful photographs that the inhabitants of Eastleigh have always been proud of their Bandstand, "*held in trust by the Council for the use of the whole of the inhabitants of Eastleigh ... so that it might be a memorial for ever that the inhabitants might enjoy*", to quote from the speech of Mr. Willmer, Chairman of Council.

Today, our Bandstand must be respected and jealously guarded by those of a later generation. Any suggestion that it came second hand from elsewhere or any attempt by another authority to purchase it must be vigorously rejected.

GORDON COX

March 1991