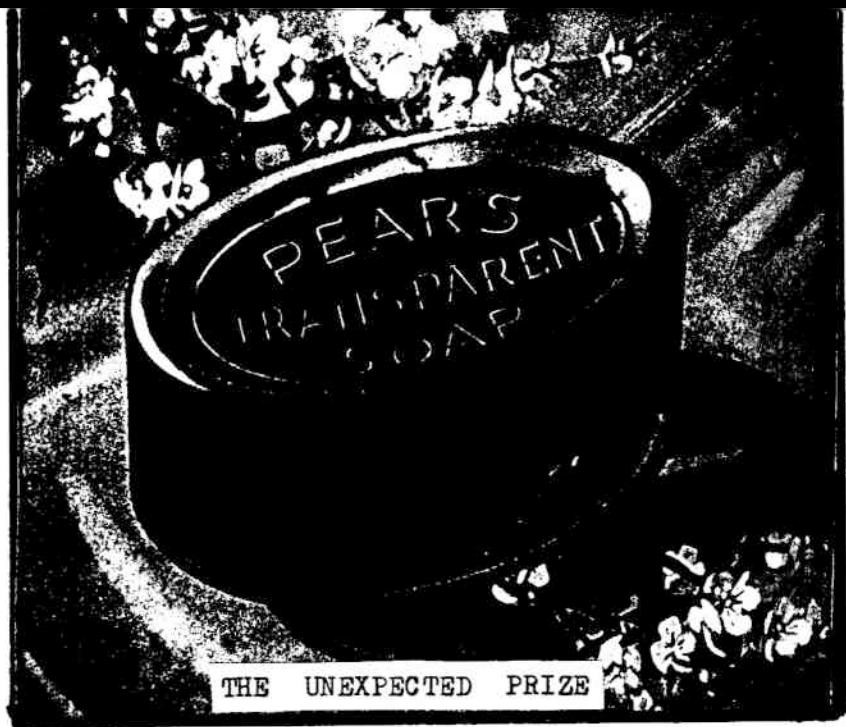
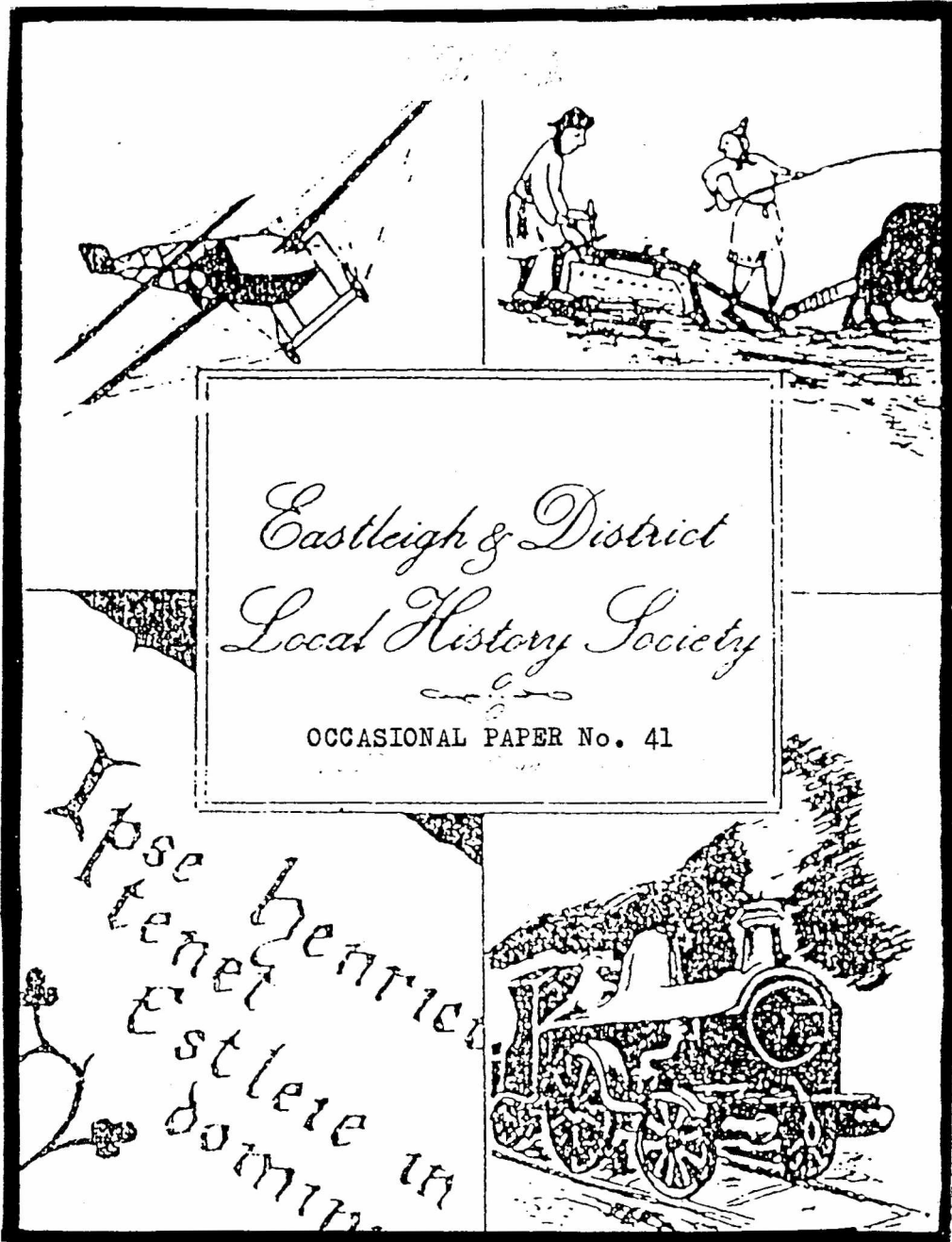
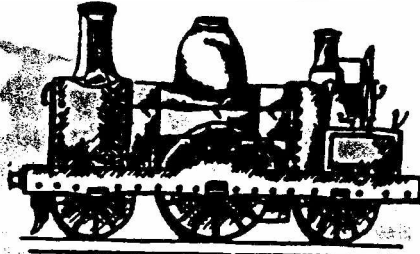


# TREATS



# Eastleigh



1895 - 1995



## TREATS

I had done as I had been told. I had been taken to a place by the side of some other very young children and been told to run up to a rope which was stretched out some way in front of me.

I suppose I was an active child and I found no difficulty in running. In this case, however, it was not on grass, cut short as on the 'Rec' or in Fleming Park but over or between grass which came up to my knees and which had a multitude of cow-pats in it. Having run as far as the rope, I went back, like the good girl I was, and shy, too, to join my mother. "You've won", some ladies said to me.

"Go and get your prize." Again I was taken by the hand to where a lady was about to give me a small packet. It had all been so sudden. I had no idea what sort of prize I might receive, but the way in which "prize" was said had raised my expectations. I was led to believe it would be something extra special. So I reached up eagerly to take what was being offered. I was encouraged to look at the contents. SOAP! I do not know if my reaction was visible. I expect it was.

Tall ladies bent over me. "How lovely", they said. I made my way back to my mother and her friends. "It's soap", I said, disgusted with the description of this mundane object as a "prize". I don't remember what she said to assuage my disappointment. I know I thought it was hardly worth all the build-up!

When people now offer soap as a birthday or Christmas present and say "something useful", a memory from the past stirs. That was how I learned the meaning of the word "race". That 'learning through experience' took place many years ago at Hursley, in the grounds belonging to Sir George Cooper, where I.B.M. now stands. It was there that some of our Sunday School treats were held.

Hursley was not on a railway line, therefore we went by a special bus or "charabanc" (pronounced "sharrabang or just called the "sharra"). I learned later, at school, that "charabanc" was French, made up of three words ... char a banc(s)... meaning a cart with benches. That was what the original bone-shakers really were. They had progressed somewhat by the 1920s and 30s. The ones which took us to Hursley were still open to the elements on the top deck. Our journey gave us several thrills. First of all there was a rush of wind in our faces as we sat on top holding onto the rails which were to prevent us from falling out. If the bus took a sharp corner too quickly then, not being of much weight, we slid along the wooden benches. Then there was the excitement of danger. "Look out!", "Duck!" and other warnings were hurled from one to another. Great branches of trees spread across the road near Hursley Park on our level. They could have blinded us or swept us away.

Other Sunday School treats were to the sea-side. Generally, these were by train to Hayling Island, to Sandbanks or to Bournemouth. I expect trains were used because: a) we came from a railway town and such transport was cheap to the workers; b) a train was the most economical unit as hundreds of children and adults could be transported in one go; and c) it was easy for a “special” to be organised by Southern Railway.

I daresay some of the children, notably the boys, were considered a problem on those trains as, despite the notice, PLEASE DO NOT LEAN OUT OF THE WINDOW, frequent warnings from parents and teachers and admonitions from railway officials, everyone who could leant out of the windows, especially on a curve in the track, to wave to friends in other compartments. On approaching our destination it was always an achievement, too, to be able to shout “the sea!” - and everyone who could craned to see the shining water. It was always shining. I cannot remember a dull day or a wet day for our treats.

The approach to Hayling Island was particularly exciting. We chuffed for about a mile over the water on high wooden trestles. They can still be seen - but the train no longer crosses to the Island. Sometimes the tide was in and sometimes it was out. At all times it was interesting. Boats could be seen on it when the water was up. At low ebb there many old hulks as well as species of water birds to be spotted. The hummocks of the sea bed and the ridges of sand formed their own patterns.

The sand in all the places chosen was fine and golden. A bucket and spade were essential equipment for all trippers. They were sometimes frugally kept from year to year. Such gear was put in the racks overhead in the trains. Never mind if you did not possess the proper equipment. It could be bought on arrival. Many were the shops selling buckets, spades, rubber shoes, rubber rings, costumes if needed, ... and, of course, the naughty postcards! (Part of our sex education was through reading them).

Occasionally there were small pebbles. These were used for a game of skill to see how many times you could make yours bounce as you bent low and threw it out, skimming the surface of the water. Then there were shells. Usually they were mussel shells, empty of course. Or there were many empty cockle shells (“all in a row”) as we sang the nursery rhyme. Others were long and spiralling. All of the varieties could be collected to be made into pictures, or stuck onto jam jars or other containers. A selection of shells could be made into ornaments, figures such as crinoline ladies.

We made sand castles - quite elaborate affairs. You really did need to be "King of the Castle" at times to throw down "the dirty rascals" who came to destroy it. If marauding children did not demolish it, then the incoming tide did. We learned about tides, ebbing and flowing, from first hand experience round our shore. The modern child who goes to the Mediterranean for sea-side holidays misses this thrill - and the rock pools left behind on some beaches.

I remember quite clearly the bright patches of pink flowers that were above the tide level, on the dunes. These were sea-pinks or thrift. They featured in a series of wild-flowers on cigarette cards and on the obverse of the hexagonal 3d bit which was introduced in 1937. They are no longer to be seen on the beaches. Gone, too, is sea-holly. This was really a decorative plant. Its leaves were unusually blue, air- force blue, the same colour as its flowers.

Apart from Sunday School treats there could be treats offered you on your birthday. Among these, a visit to the live theatre in Southampton or Portsmouth, not for drama but for vaudeville shows, was possible. These were a lively mixture of singing and dancing, juggling and acrobatics. The latter could be seen, together with zoo animals like elephants, at the circus which came about Christmas time. I think it was at a place near Edwin Jones in Southampton, which is now Debenhams store. Here there was bare-back riding and trapeze artistry.

I could not practise this at home but I did become quite proficient at juggling three balls in the air. Many people loved the slapstick comedy of the clowns. At the circus and at Christmas time pantomime we children were encouraged to sing at the top of our voices or to shout, which was something I was never allowed to do at home.

For less money, a visit to the cinema, the "pictures" or the "flicks" was possible as a treat. In Eastleigh it meant going to "The Picture House" or "The Regal. Some boys and girls were given enough pocket money to be able to go regularly every Saturday - 1d downstairs and 2d up. I did not go often. When I did, it seemed to be a film about a dog called Rintintin or it was part of an on-going serial. Each episode ended in a cliff-hanger. Will the man or lady tied to the railway line be rescued before the express train comes thundering past? How will the heroine escape from the burning building? Most of these films were American, a very great number being cowboy films, until we came to the "must" of all time - "Gone With The Wind". After that, there were numerous British war films.

We had no North American "trick or treating" at Halloween in my young days. There were Halloween parties inextricably mixed for me with parish socials and the celebration of All Saints Day, again church orientated.

A real "treat" was the orange which we were given when we left the Christmas socials at the Parish Hall or at friends' houses. Wisely, it was always given to take home.

What simple pleasures our treats were. How grateful we were.

Kathleen Clarke

October 1992

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