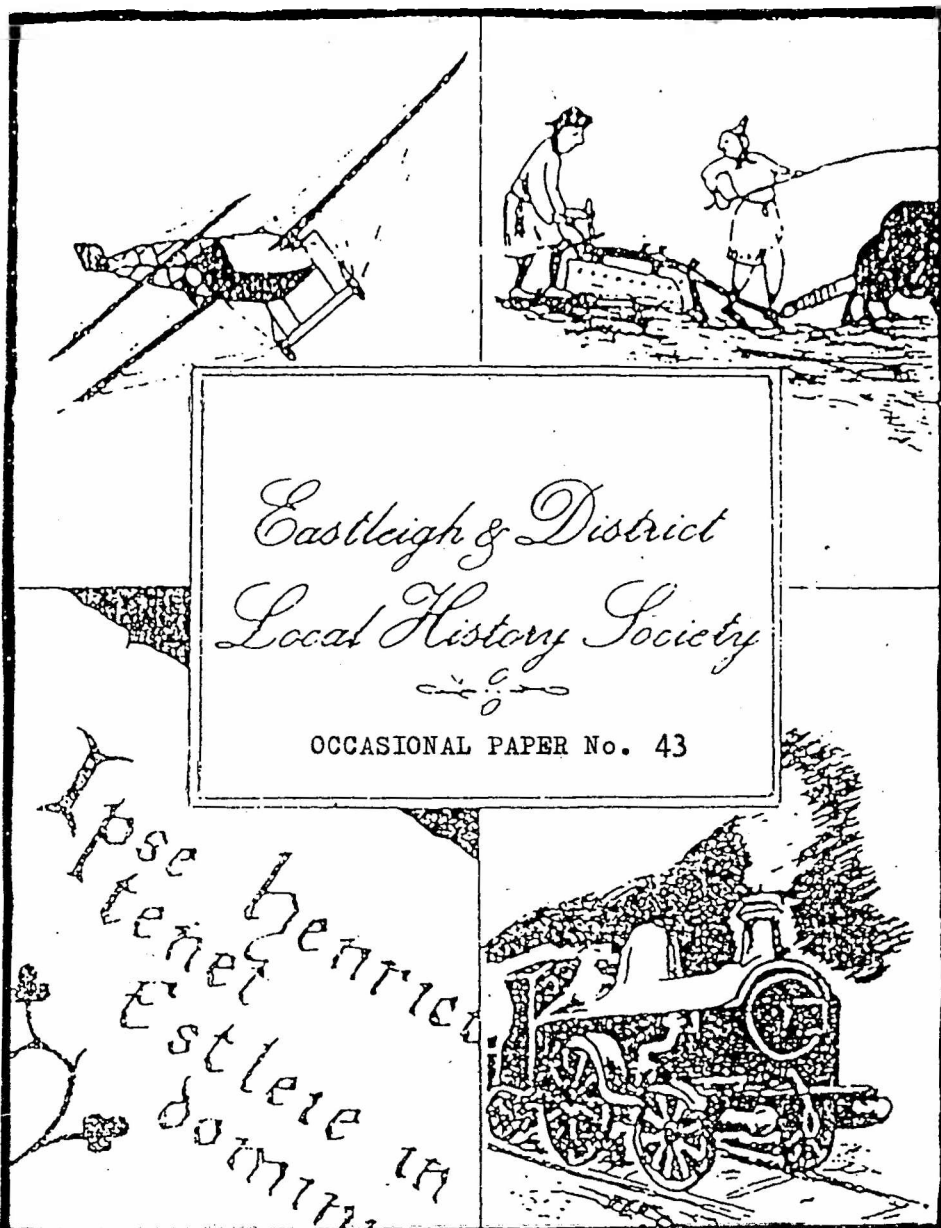
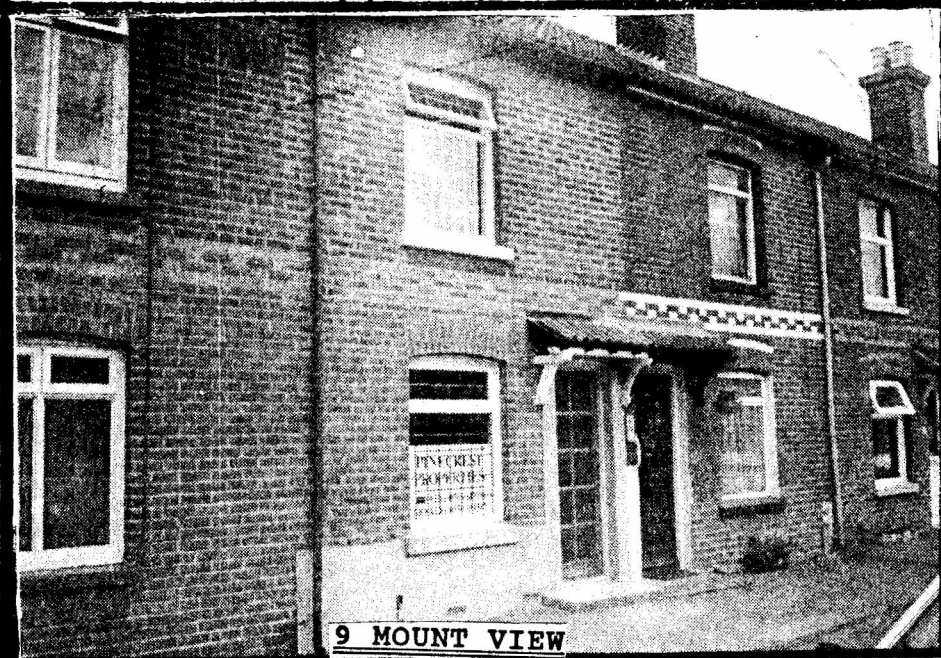


Growing up in the Twenties



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GROWING UP IN THE TWENTIES

I was born on 28th March 1916 when, I am told, winter had returned with a vengeance and snow lay very deep. I was one of a twin, the 7th and 8th children born to Charles and Edith Compton of 9 Mount View, Eastleigh. Baptized Albert and Lillian, in the family we were known as Sonner and Girly. The first-born son had died in 1912 aged 12 years. With two older sisters in domestic service, there were five children at home. Two more brothers arrived in 1919 and 1924. Dad was a ganger on the Railway permanent way. He was 17 years older than Mum. Our home was one of fourteen houses occupied mainly by railway workers. We had no front gardens and the road was mainly gravel; we youngsters were rarely without bandaged knees (I still have the scars). It was, however, an ideal place to live for beyond the fenced and gated road allotment type gardens led to the meadows which were our playgrounds.

In spring, boys would catch tadpoles in jam jars from the pond. Girls would pick the yellow king cups and forget-me-nots that grew round the edges. In summer we would picnic and boys would play cricket. In the autumn there were blackberries to be picked and turned into jam. The boys would forage for the lovely shiny horse chestnuts for the game of conkers. A metal meat skewer made the hole where string would be threaded and all would be ready for battle to see who would demolish the most conkers. In winter, if the pond froze over, and after our Dads pronounced it safe, they would slide or make rough sledges. The main railway line ran alongside the fenced meadow and we children didn't need watches for we knew the times of all the trains. In the morning it was time to set out for school when the 8.20 a.m. to London was signalled and at dinner time Mum would wash hands and faces at the scullery sink and send us off with the warning not to hang about as the 1.15 p.m. down train was due.

School for us was in Winchester Road. It was built in 1870 and had just two classrooms; additional rooms were added in 1882 and again in 1889. Further extension was carried out and a new building to serve the older girls was erected separately, but in close connection with the original school. It was in the Infants Department with Miss Glanfield as Head Teacher that we started our schooling. With us were two other sets of twins, all girls and living within a few hundred yards of each other. During our first year an epidemic of Scarlet Fever descended on Eastleigh and my brother and I were casualties, which meant being taken to the Isolation Hospital at Chandlers Ford for six weeks. No visitors were allowed, of course, and boys and girls had different wards, cut off from each other until, when convalescing, we could play together in the spacious grounds; it was probably a very traumatic time for us.

The sweet shop opposite the School owned by Mrs. Gale was always well stocked with the popular sweets of that time, i.e. Aniseed Balls, Pear Drops, Liquorice Allsorts, Pipes and Bootlaces, Tiger Nuts, Locust Beans, Sherbet Dabs and Fountains as well as the large bottles of boiled sweets. For a penny we could take our choice.

Moving up at seven years of age to the Upper School I found it terrifying, being small for my age; the older girls looked very large but I remember they were very kind to us. My brother and the other seven year olds were transferred to Chamberlayne Road where the Headmaster was Mr. Shotton.

In 1925 our family received a severe shock when my twin died in Southampton Hospital having his tonsils removed; he was nine years old.

Sunday School also played a large part in our lives. My father was very strict but very kind and we were not allowed out to play on Sundays, so it was no hardship to be dressed in our best clothes for an hour in the morning and again in the afternoon. It had its advantages though as we had the Summer Treat to Lee-on-Solent and a Christmas Party held in the Church hut. We travelled by train on the Main Railway from Eastleigh to Fort Brockhurst where we joined the small train on the Branch Line which took us right into Lee-on-Solent. The sun always seemed to shine. There Mr. and Mrs. Breadner had care of the little ones and Miss Stilling watched over the older ones; quite a lot of mothers came along to help supervise.

There were fourteen youngsters in our road and we all played happily together most of the time and quarrels never lasted long. Boys played marbles, football and cricket while the girls spun tops, skipped and rolled their hoops. My best friend at that time was Mildred, an only child. She had a Grandad who was a blacksmith and had his forge in a huge shed. In winter time we would shelter there from the cold and he would let us work the bellows which kept his fire going. Her father was a chauffeur and also had his own car, very unusual in those days. On summer Saturdays he would take us to the seaside, usually Bognor. We felt very grand sitting in the back of the tourer.

My father, being a Railway employee, was allowed free passes and during his week's holiday would take us to Weymouth, Swanage, Bognor and sometimes London Zoo. Weymouth was the most popular with the donkey rides and Punch and Judy Shows. Waiting on the station we would beg Dad for pennies to spend on the machines which sold chocolate bars and packets of raisins, but the Printing Machine was very popular where your name could be punched on aluminium strips, useful for identifying property.

Tragedy struck once more in 1927 when my father became ill and sadly died; he was sixty-one years old. Mother was left with four of us aged between two and a half and fourteen years. Widow's Pension was ten shillings a week. Edward at fourteen could leave school and his first job was as an assistant baker's roundsman, for which he received six shillings a week. Archie, also a Railway worker, took over the role of Father. He was twenty-two years old.

On the two allotments that Dad had cultivated for years he grew all the vegetables and fruit needed. How my Mother coped I can't imagine but we never went to bed hungry. In later years she told of the kindness of the Vicar of the Parish Church, Rev. Wells, in those difficult days.

Again, in 1928, scarlet fever descended on Eastleigh. Once more I was a victim, this time with my seven year old brother, Sidney, which meant six more weeks at the Isolation Hospital. I was now eleven years old and at an important stage of my school life as it was the time to sit for the scholarship examination which determined which children went on to Barton Peveril Grammar School. I had worked hard and set my heart on doing well enough to gain a place but with a loss of six weeks school work I knew I had little chance of being amongst the winners. Looking back, I expect it was a relief to my mother as there was little help for further education at that time. That year I became a King's Messenger in a study group attached to the church and on Tuesday evenings we met at the church hut. Our mentor, Miss Stirling, taught us about the lives and hardships of the black population, especially the slaves of Africa, also of the missionaries who worked in that country. At the end of each year we would sit examinations and certificates would be awarded. We also acted out plays depicting the lives of these sad people.

Winter evenings at home were never dull. Mother was very musical and played the harmonium for us, mostly hymns, which we would all join in singing. The gramophone, wind-up version, of course, kept us quiet; records (breakable) were assorted. I remember some of the names. Two favourites of Mum's were "Shepherd of the Hills" and "In a Monastery Garden". For us young ones "Horsey keep your tail up" and "Felix the Cat". Later my brother sent away for the parts and built a radio. That was magic. A large acid filled battery powered the set; periodically it had to be taken to the shop in Southampton Road owned by Mr. Bryce Slade to be recharged. A tricky journey this, for if not carried upright the acid could drip out causing havoc to clothes. We played the usual indoor games, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders, Draughts and Shove Halfpenny played on the back of Mum's huge pastry board.

On Saturday morning the great attraction was the Twopenny Rush at the Picture House. Of course the films were silent but the enthusiastic audience (children only) were certainly not; stamping feet and booing the villain was the order of the day.

In 1928 a new school for girls was built in Chamberlayne Road which meant a move for eleven year olds who would mix with girls from various districts of Eastleigh to finish their education at fourteen years. We were very proud of our navy blue gym slips, white blouses and, of course, the hats. Most of all, the joy of indoor toilets and wash basins. Miss Brine was Headmistress, a very well respected lady in Eastleigh.

At that period "The Atlantic Park" had come into existence in Wide Lane, Swaythling. Emigrants from Poland and Eastern Europe were taken there to wait for ships that would get them to America. Old hangars which had been used for The US Naval Air force were transformed into homes for the families, some of whom stayed quite a long time. Joining us at our new school were three of the children whose names were, I remember, Maria Davies, Bronia Water and Marie whose surname I never could spell. They settled in very well and Marie became Head Girl.

After two and a half happy years and having made many friends it was time for us to leave school. We had to go our various ways to earn our living - plenty of opportunities at that time. As I had a desire to work with children it meant moving away from home but only as far as Winchester. I was taught by an old family nurse who could be quite a tyrant but who made sure I learnt my lesson well, enabling me to fulfil my ambition at the end of my apprenticeship.

Now in 1993 there are just three of us Compton children left. Mother died in 1966 aged eighty seven years. My eldest brother, eighty nine years of age, blind and crippled, still lives in the family home. My youngest brother and I try now to repay him for all he gave up for us whilst we were "Growing up in the Twenties".

LILLIAN PAYNE

October 1993

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