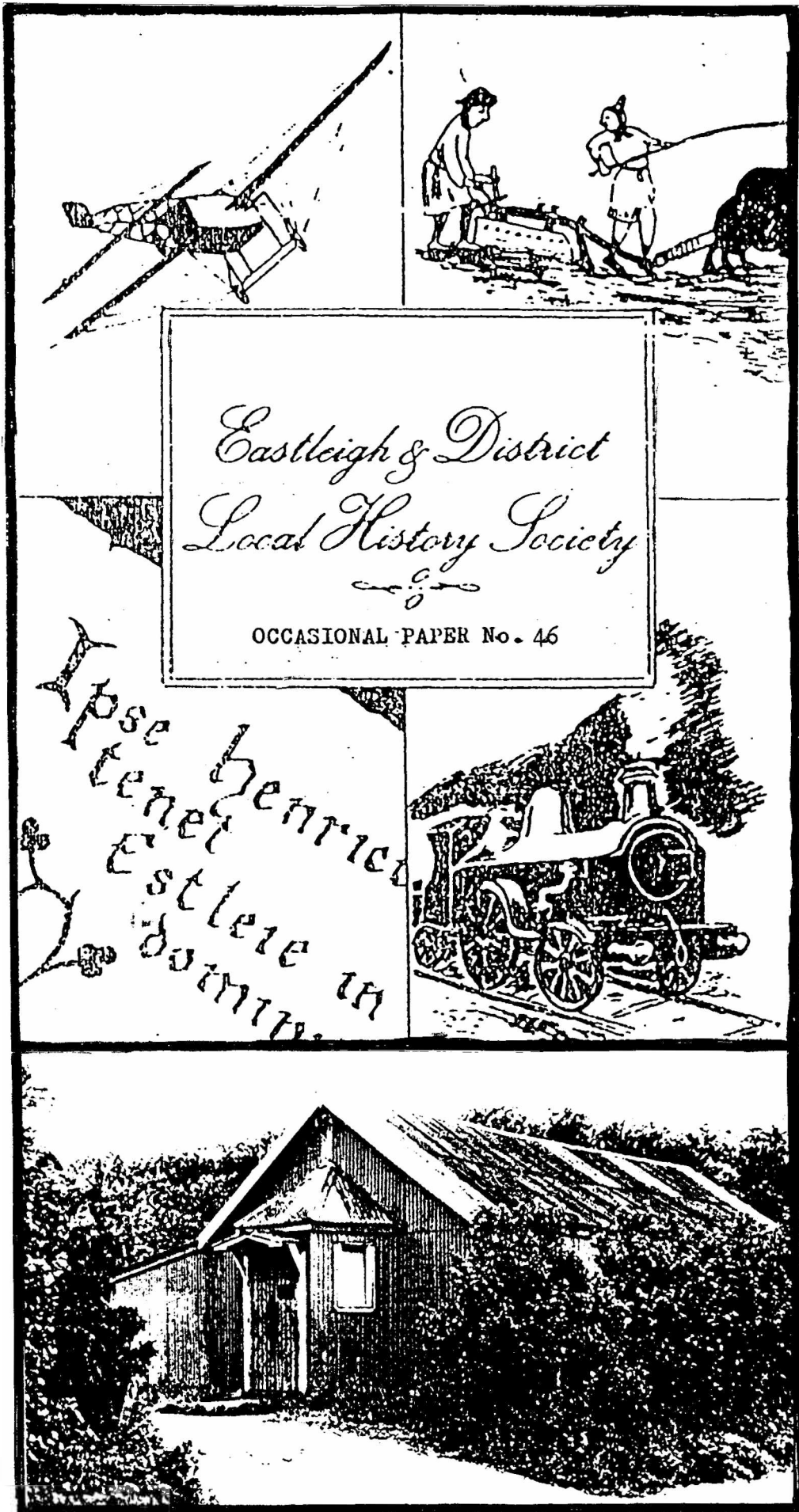
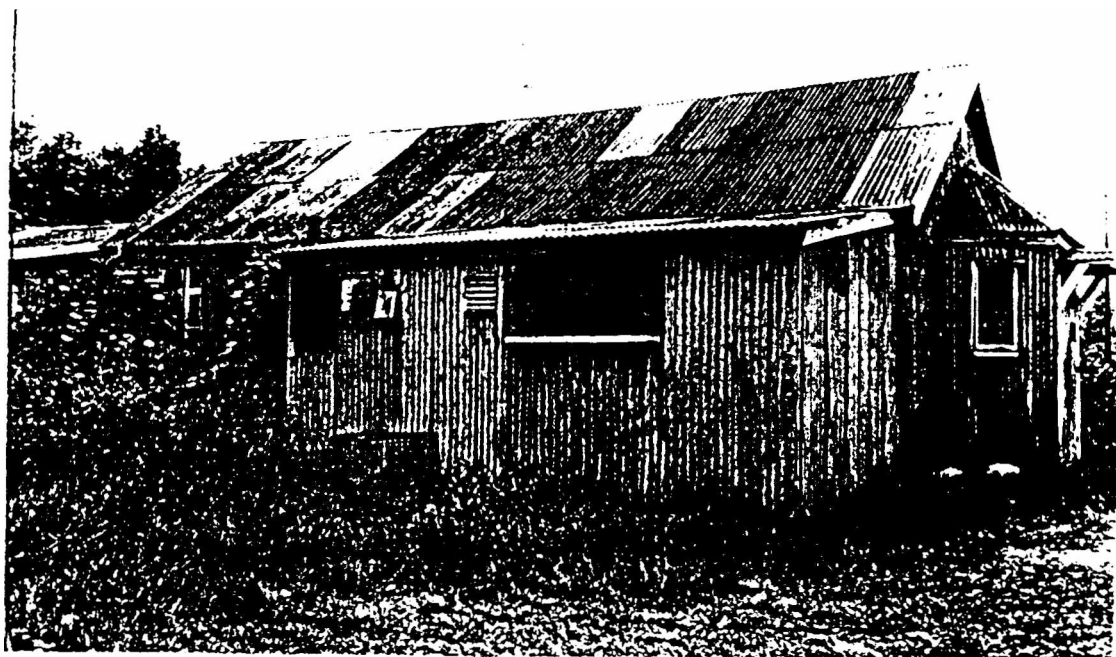
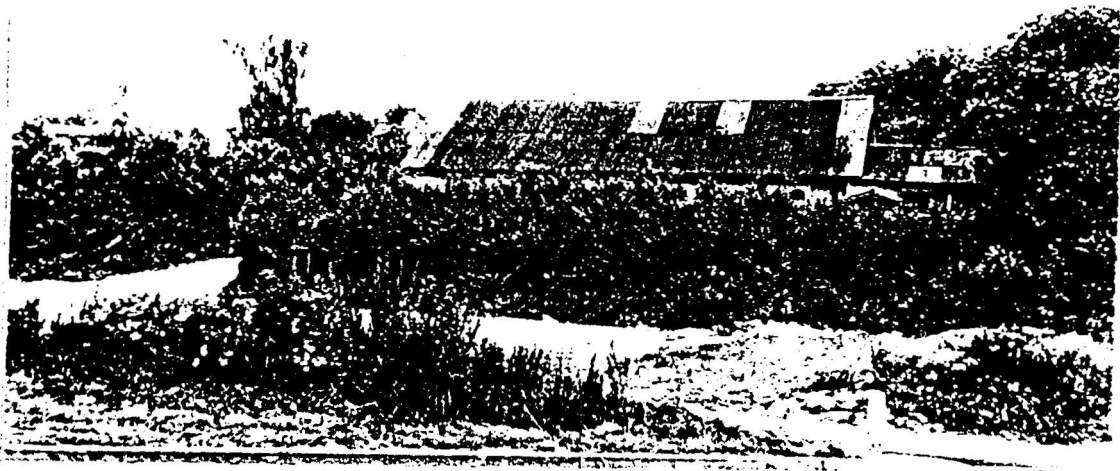


ST NICOLAS HALL





SAINT NICOLAS CHURCH HALL

Saint Nicolas Church Hall or the Green Hut, as it was sometimes affectionately called, stood as a landmark at the corner of Stoneham Lane for over seventy years. The land on which it stood was reputed to have been given by the Fleming family to the people of North Stoneham so that they might erect a hall on the site to be used not merely for Church functions but also for village meetings and activities.

The hut was a first world war field hospital building which was bought by North Stoneham people and re-erected on the land in Stoneham by Fred and Arthur Barnes, the local blacksmiths, with the help of villagers as well. Over the seventy years of its existence many functions, meetings and activities have been held there including in the 1960s a lively Nursery School run by Miss Dixon. Confirmation classes were held in the hall and when candidates were confirmed at St. Nicolas Church, the celebration tea or lunch, prepared by local people, was held there.

For many years, the hall was in use every evening, most afternoons and on Sundays. The Sunday School was held there by Miss Dixon. There was the Mothers Union with Mrs. Dear as the enrolling member and sewing (mostly aprons) on Wednesday afternoons in aid of the Church Sale of Work. There were Harvest Suppers, Cheese and Wine events, Whist Drives, Beetle Drives, Jumble Sales, Craft Shows, Bazaars, Dances, Discos and Quizzes. The Church Youth Club met there and held many events to raise money for the Nightingale Avenue Youth Centre, to be opened later by Princess Margaret. There was also the Bell-Ringing Guild and many will remember the preparatory meetings for the wonderful holidays in Belgium organised by Mr. and Mrs. Forster. Scouts, Cubs, Guides and Brownies met at the Hall for many years. In its last years, the Hall was used by the local Dog Training Group under the guidance of Mrs. Roberts or Miss Penny Dodd. It was a sad day when the seventy year old building had to come down.

SCOUTING

There was a Scout Troop meeting at St. Nicolas Parish Hall at least as early as the 1940s and the Scoutmaster was Rev. Roberts. In 1962, a Cub Pack was started for the benefit of the younger boys living on the new Council House estate, the Cub master being Ken Smith. Meetings during the winter were a real challenge because there was little heating and lighting was by gas, so the accent had to be on activities to keep the boys moving.

In summer, outdoor activities were held at Three Corner Woods - now the Asda roundabout - or in Green Grove, long before Hillier's Nurseries took over the fields which later became Lakeside Park. Church parades were a monthly feature and it was a familiar sight to see the Scouts, Guides, Cubs and Brownies marching along the narrow hedge-lined Stoneham Lane with flags flying on their way to St. Nicolas Church - few cars to bother about then.

Rev. Roberts left North Stoneham to become Vicar of Weston in Southampton and John Banfield became Scoutmaster with Rev. S. Wincott as Group Scoutmaster. Meanwhile the Wolf Cub Pack flourished, reaching a maximum of 36 boys at one time. It seemed that all the young lads on the estate crammed into the Hall at 6.30.p.m. on Wednesdays for an evening of fun and games. Among the helpers at the time were Norman Boyes, Pam White, Derek Dee and Anita Norris.

In the early sixties, Ken Smith left to become Assistant District Commissioner for Cubs in Eastleigh and the cubs were then led by Anita Norris with Jim Clarke in charge of the Scout Troop. The 11th Eastleigh continued from strength to strength and towards the end of the sixties Eddy Seymour became Cub Scout Leader and George Gale the Scout Leader. The Gale family had a very strong influence on the Group for a number of years; in due course, the Group transferred its meeting place to St. Francis Church Hall in Nightingale Avenue.

Times spent in the old "Tin Shack" are remembered with pleasure and are often referred to as the good old days. Young, Cox, Green, Pitcher, Griffin, McCardle, Hosmer, Raymond, Glanville, Watson, Jones, Norman, Hurst are just some of the many names that come to mind as boys of those former days. The church authority was most helpful and there was never any charge for the use of the Hall; thank you for that privilege.

GUIDING

The Guide Company at North Stoneham was started as a result of a chance remark. When Miss Dixon was delivering the monthly parish magazine at the home of Mrs. Joan Scott in 1953, she noticed a photograph showing the 1st Bishopstoke Guide Company of which Mrs. Scott was formerly the Captain and she asked, "Do you think you could organise a Company for North Stoneham for Rev. Shail?" There followed a Guide Company and a Brownie Pack which met weekly in the Green Hut until 1957 when the two units were transferred to the Eastleigh District under Mrs. Capeling, the local District Commissioner. Many happy hours were spent in the Hall with all the activities of Guiding.

GENERAL RECOLLECTIONS

It is with fond memories and a little nostalgia that I recall events at the Green Hut, says Mrs. Bryan, née Scott.

My first real experiences were of Guiding and cold winter evenings. There was something special about gathering with my patrol around one of the four gas fires. Each patrol would place chairs in a semi-circle round the fire and discuss the allotted project while the Captain and Lieutenant stayed in the centre at the head of the hall. I sometimes wonder whether they felt cold away from the warmth of the fires. There is something unusual about these buildings with their un-lived-in smell plus that of plasticene and poster paint and the protection from the wind and rain outside. Perhaps it gave us a feeling of comradeship and self reliance, fondly but imprecisely remembered over the years.

Twenty years later, I helped give a face lift to the interior of the hall. We repainted the kitchen end and Mrs. Scott installed wall cupboards, a sink unit and cooker. It was summer time and we spent several cheery evenings, banging, sawing, fixing, painting, with teapot and mugs at the ready. A final four hours, very late one evening, saw us varnishing the floor with a special sealant. I don't know how we survived the fumes which were terrible. Several friends and relatives of Mrs. Scott took it in turns with the brush and knee pads, pausing to get their breath back every ten minutes or so. I have no doubt that we shall all remember just how big an expanse that floor was.

Twelve years afterwards and then annually, I had occasion to hire the hall for the Hamster Fancy. As a show secretary for the Southern Hamster Club, I was responsible for arranging the Eastleigh Show and members travelled from Dawlish, Exeter, Bristol, Watford, Manchester and London to exhibit. Others came from Hastings, Worthing and even South Wales and to this day they still say how they miss the Eastleigh Show and the special atmosphere of the North Stoneham Green Hut despite the cess pit overflowing and the groggy toilet seat.

SPECIAL OCCASION

Mrs. R.M. Moore, nee Gibbs, has memories of attending happy "hops" at the Green Hut before the last war, but a particular one of a special occasion during the war when, she says, "My husband was stationed here so we were granted permission to hold our wedding reception there 50 years ago." Then four of her sisters became engaged and they too held their wedding receptions at the hall.

CHURCH CHOIR

The Service of Evensong is coming to an end. The final hymn is being sung. Soon the choir of St. Nicolas Church, North Stoneham, will be dashing down Stoneham Lane to the Green Hut. When they reach the Hut, they will find someone has put out a table tennis table, a darts board, a snooker table, several other games, an old record player and some bottles of orange squash. So a Sunday evening session of the church choir club has begun. The noise is considerable and growing with between twenty and thirty young people aged from nine to fifteen enjoying themselves.

It was in 1960 that Rev. John Pipworth decided that something should be done to make the role of the choir more acceptable to young people. So boys were invited to join and about ten did so. They were tough, likeable lads who soon formed themselves into a football team for mainly five-a-side matches.

Singing in a church choir, including choir practices, was more or less a side line to the games that were played. Slowly the choir grew in numbers with the Green Hut at the centre of operations for planning meetings of parents, outings, occasional jumble sales with the proceeds going to the choir for the purchase of equipment. "We don't want any girls in the club", said the boys. But the voices of boys change so it was decided to let girls join. And join they did. Sunday night became disco night when Richard Lewis and his friends put out their equipment and the noise made the neighbours complain.

The choir got bigger and more activities were dreamed up like trips abroad and barbeques in the New Forest. Visits to Belgium were most appreciated and the beaches there proved to be very popular although the food was sometimes regarded with suspicion. Go-karting was tried by young and old on the promenade and occasionally with dire results in the streets of Blankenburg where they were not supposed to be.

When excursions proved to be too expensive, a kind hotel owner in Cheltenham opened up her hotel to the choir and many happy weekends were spent boating on the lake, visiting the Cotswolds, eating fish and chips in the park and attending church on Sundays.

Most of these activities were planned and thought about in the Green Hut and gave many youngsters much enjoyment and perhaps a sense of values.

THE END

St. Nicolas Church, North Stoneham, will soon be without a parish hall. The Parochial Church Council has approved a proposal that the Hall at the junction of Chestnut Avenue and Stoneham Lane, which is in poor structural condition, shall be closed.

It has also been decided that once closed down the hall should be demolished as quickly as possible to avoid further vandalism and efforts are being made to sell the site. The parishioners were agreed that a new hall was needed nearer to the church on part of the present car park. A fund-raising committee is being formed to collect contributions over a three year period and it was agreed that the architect should be asked to submit new plans if required after that period with a maximum cost of £100,000 at 1991 prices.

An application has been made to the Urban Regeneration Fund for a grant and, if this is forthcoming, preliminary work will be carried out.

Rev. Ralph Gurr, priest-in-charge, has commented that if a hall near the church is really wanted, every member of St. Nicolas must give serious thought to fund raising and how personally to help meet what will be a massive challenge. The future of St. Nicolas could well depend on the measure of commitment offered.

1993

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