The Early Years of the Leigh Park Housing Estate
Compiled by Ralph Cousins

The first houses to be occupied in Bramdean Drive, 1949. *The News*

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Introduction

In 1983/84 the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) ran a project looking at the history of the Leigh Park housing estate during the time from when the land was purchased by Portsmouth City Council in 1943 up to 1984.

A booklet was produced which was written and compiled by Sally Ann Brown and the Leigh Park history team of Kay Day, Glyn Loveday, Amanda Marriott, Geoffrey Suter, Jane Woodmansay, Simon O'Shea, Shirley Montague, Debra Pharoah and Dora Bawden. They were assisted by the contributions of many Leigh Park residents.

As only a few copies survive so, given that there is still an interest in the early, very difficult, years I have scanning a copy and reproduced it here.

In 1997 a further history was published by the Leigh Park Community Association.

Although some of the first booklet was reproduced in this second history I thought it would be useful to combine these two booklets and add to them as many photographs as I could find.

Many of these photographs came to light during a Leigh Park Community Heritage Project organised by Making Space during 2011 to 2014.

It is hoped that this booklet will show that Leigh Park has something to be proud of and build upon in the future – a heritage and identity of its own.

Comments on this publication would be most welcome.

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November 2016

For accounts of the earlier history of Leigh Park read also the following Havant Borough History booklets: A History of Leigh Park and the Hamlet of Leigh, A Brief History of Stockheath and Farms in the Leigh Park Area, copies of which are in the local history section of the Leigh Park library.
The second Leigh Park House which was demolished in 1959

The former bowling alley was converted into a bingo hall and opened by Diana Dors in 1984.
The Early Years of the Leigh Park Housing Estate

Introduction

In the spring of 1983 the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, (NACRO), initiated a community scheme aimed at helping both the long term unemployed and the people of Leigh Park. The aim was to take the former from the dole queue and to give the latter, through an examination of the past, a better grasp of their history leading to a sense of continuity. We did have our doubts at the beginning. When discussing the project with others and informing them of our intentions, the near universal retort was ‘Leigh Park’ There's no history to Leigh Park is there? We couldn't answer that question in early 1984. We can now; the answer is a resounding YES! This book aims to show part of that multi-faceted past.

The Leigh Park housing estate is approaching its fortieth birthday. The first council tenants moved in during 1949, mainly from war ravaged Portsmouth. These pioneers, (and to some, the estate had that pioneering feel to it) were eager to set up home and enjoyed living on the estate, away from the bleak environs of Portsmouth. However, this feeling of well-being was not sustained as the estate grew. Credit must be given to Portsmouth City Council for their initial foresight in planning a near Utopian housing complex for the returning service personnel, and the victims of the blitz. While the place was being constructed, several roads were diverted to avoid destruction of oaks and other mature trees, enhancing the rural quality of the estate. As with many other authorities throughout the country, Portsmouth had the responsibility of turning dreams and expectations of the people in post-war Britain into reality.

Leigh Park is not just about buildings and council decisions – more importantly it is about people. The history of a place is the sum total of the people who live there. We have been able through interviews with some early residents, to glimpse what living in Leigh Park has meant to people in more recent times. Outside living memory, the geological changes and migrations of animals and people in ancient times can be traced in the soil of the estate. Through this evidence the lives of Paeleolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), and Neolithic (New Stone Age) people can be reconstructed with a great deal of accuracy.

Their successors, the Celts, Romans, Saxons and Normans, have left their mark
on the estate. During Medieval times much of the estate was encompassed by the Forest of Bere. Gradually areas were cleared for agriculture and in the 18th century, the estate began to take shape.

The identity of the district was most drastically moulded by Sir George Staunton, who owned the estate.

By the mid-fifties, there were 10,000 people within the estate’s ever increasing boundaries. The problems that were to manifest themselves during the next decade were identified, yet little was done to alleviate these pressures, either through lack of foresight or misguided good intentions.

In this short history we hope to show that the people of Leigh Park have a heritage and an identity of their own. We have endeavoured to illustrate that the people of Leigh Park are, to a certain extent, victims of bureaucracy and decision making not within their control.

We would like to thank all the people who have helped us in our research, either by being interviewed and/or lending us material for our research. We would also like to thank the organisations in this area that co-operated with us. Thanks must go to the Evening News and to Portsmouth City Council for all their assistance. We hope that you enjoy these excerpts from the past and that you are stimulated into pursuing the subject further.

Leigh Park in the Beginning

Fire and Ice

Leigh Park has at various times been under the sea, under the ground, and covered in ice. The geology of the area is a history written in rock, a story of upheavals and drowned worlds; brimstone spewing volcanoes and the quiet deaths of billions of ancient Crustacea; of sedimentary muds and grinding glaciers. Once Hampshire was a huge dome of chalk laid down in the warm shallow seas of primeval times. Through the forces of eruption, movement, and erosion the landscape was carved.

The First Residents

Rare finds of flint-work indicate that our earliest ancestors were present in Leigh Park near Bartons Road. The bulk of evidence for the presence of people in Leigh
Park during the pre-history comes from the Mesolithic period. At this time the Solent was a large river fed by many streams, which eventually flowed into the Channel river, a combined Somme and Seine, that flowed to the Atlantic. It was possible to walk to the Isle of Wight and France. The bison, the auroch and the mammoth were all residents of the area. Chichester and Portsmouth were once shallow valleys with streams flowing along them.

It is at Wakefords School [Havant Academy] that we have our best evidence; pits were found while levelling the area, containing a quantity of flint implements, and possibly post-holes, which indicate huts or shelters with hearths. The site has been dated to around 3,700 BC making residential Leigh Park 5,000 years old; other areas of Mesolithic habitation in Leigh Park were at Warren Park and Stockheath Common.

Neolithic finds were discovered at Dunsbury Hill Farm and the Hermitage Stream. Associated finds were discovered at Langstone Harbour, Rowlands Castle, Blendworth, Chalton, and Buster Hill, a ‘trail’ which leads from the river valleys to the chalk uplands of Hampshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire. These uplands were connected by a track system or ridgeways. A trackway runs along the south coast through Havant and along Portsdown Hill, where we find the remains of Neolithic burial mounds, or tumuli.

A number of years before the end of the Neolithic period the sea had broken through creating the Solent and the English Channel. Not only had the landscape begun to change anew, but mankind’s technology has undertaken a radical change.

The Age of Metals

It is apparent that Wakefords is an important site and occupation continued into the Bronze Age. A number of artefacts were found there. The evidence for this period is sparse but there were people of this era on Portsdown, Hayling and to the north towards Butser Hill.

Wakefords also produced Iron Age Materials and we begin to build up a complex picture of a society in and around Leigh Park with farms, field systems, forts and temples. There was a hill fort at Townerbury on Hayling and sites at Portchester, Hamble Common, Old Winchester Hill, Butser Hill and Portsdown Hill (between Farlington redoubt and Fort Purbrook).
Veni, Vidi, Vici. (I Came, I Saw, I Conquered.)

The Celtic tribes did not dominate Britain for long. The might of Rome challenged them and won, first Julius Caesar, and later Claudius; for nearly 400 years Britain was Romanised. The main Roman town in Hampshire was Silchester in the north. A map of Roman Hampshire shows many roads radiating from Silchester, two of which led to the important naval bases at Bitterne and Chichester. These two were also joined by a road that ran through Wickham, Southwick, Bedhampton, Havant and Emsworth. A Roman road ran between Havant and Rowlands Castle, where there were some kilns, and through part of West Leigh. Roman settlements are indicated in the area at Havant, Warblington and Bedhampton by villas. Other indications are to be found on the estate at Simmonds Hill, Petersfield Road, Sharps Road, Stansted Crescent and, of course, Wakefords Copse.

The Saxons were already making inroads into Britain before the Romans left these islands. The fort at Portchester is part of the ‘Saxon Shore’ defences erected by the Romans. Eventually these Germanic peoples reached Hampshire. Leigh Park was then a densely wooded area and was used for a variety of purposes, from hunting to coppicing. Watercress was grown in the Hermitage Stream. On Portsdown Hill, near Fort Widley, a Saxon burial ground was found. The people of this time were of smaller stature than is average today and they suffered very little from tooth decay. However, disease took its toll and most adults did not live past 40 years old.

The Saxons soon found themselves under sway of Normandy. During the Norman Conquest, the area between Chichester and Portchester became the beachhead for William’s campaign in the south. Scrutiny of the Domesday Book reveals that some detachments may have marched through the Forest of Bere to reinforce him at Easton during his attack on Winchester.

At a later date, manors were established at Warblington and Bedhampton. Much of the area was made over into Royal forest or free chases. Havant Thicket, which was then known as Havant Chase, was owned by the Bishop of Winchester, who also owned most of the land that was to become Leigh Park; it was not relinquished until the early 19th century.

For much of the succeeding centuries the area was given over to forestry and agriculture. The civil war impinged only slightly on the area and a minor
earthquake was recorded. It is not until the early 18th century that we find the first references to occupation by local gentry, the area being marked on early maps by a round fence, denoting the estate.

Perhaps one of the biggest influences on the estate was the purchase in 1820 of the lease by Sir George Staunton, an expert on China. Several years later he bought the freehold from the Bishop of Winchester. Sir George invested both his money and imagination into creating a large and prosperous estate. Through his efforts the gardens, with their large and antique collection of Asian plants, became justly famous. As Member of Parliament for Portsmouth, he had to cross two sets of railway lines to travel to his constituency. As this caused him a great deal of inconvenience he paid to have New Road built to bypass these bottlenecks. [It is now believed that Staunton created a track across what was his land but the hard road was actually constructed by his successor, William Stone.]

After his death the estate was bought by another Member of Parliament, William Stone, who built a fine Victorian gothic house which has, unfortunately, been demolished. Much of the gardens have disappeared as have the numerous buildings that dotted its acres. The house was later purchased by the Fitzwygram family who retained it until the early 20th century.

As you can see there is a wealth of history to the estate. Much has been lost but there is still much left to discover.

Two World Wars

Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Wellington John Fitzwygram was a prominent figure in Hampshire life at the end of the last century. He had served in the Crimean war and later became Inspector-general of the calvary and President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. He was author of such works as *Horses and Stables, Notes on Shoeing* and *Utilisation of Cottage Sewage*. He employed former members of his regiment on the Leigh Park estate, which was run not surprisingly, with military efficiency; grass verges had to be perfectly straight to pass Sir Frederick’s inspection. He was an alderman, magistrate and conservative Member of Parliament for South Hampshire from 1884 to 1900. A conservative fête was held at Leigh Park in June 1886, described as being on a scale never before equalled in the south of England.

After his death in 1904 the estate was passed on to his son, the fifth baronet, Sir Frederick Loftus Francis Fitzwygram. He was a twenty-year-old soldier and
Justice of the Peace. His main contribution to the locality seems to have been the establishment of the Leigh Park Beagle Hunt. This met twice a week and ‘capital sport’ was enjoyed over the hills between Havant and Petersfield. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 signalled a radical change for Leigh Park House and its owner. The house was used by evacuees from Hilsea College, Portsmouth, and Sir Frederick fought in France for his regiment, the Scots Guards. In 1920 he died as a result of injuries received at the front, as he had not married the estate went to his sister, Angela Charlotte Amelia Fitzwygram.

Leigh Park was used largely for mixed farming. There were approximately sixteen different farms, the largest being Prospect Farm (134 acres) and Middle Park Farm (194 acres). The remainder were smallholdings of between four and thirty acres. Large expanses of grazing and arable land were leased to different farmers and the cottages, which are still standing in New Lane, Petersfield Road etc. housed tenants who paid between four and ten shillings rent each.

During the Second World War, Leigh Park House was requisitioned by the Admiralty Mining Research Department. They were primarily concerned with underwater countermeasure and weapons, to combat the mines which were a constant threat to the Royal Navy.

Most of the employees working at the establishment travelled from Portsmouth each day. They would catch a train to Havant, where a bus collected them and took them to the house. Mr Buckingham, one of the research workers, remembers Sir Dymoke White (a local landowner whose father was a co-founder of Timothy Whites) driving around the country lanes in a carriage with four matched horses.

“Our establishment was split into two halves. Some of my colleagues would have to come down to the workshop and catch a bus when coming back to Leigh Park House. Around the corner one day came Sir Dymoke White with his four in hand. He pulled in and asked the men if they wanted a lift. They got on board and he asked them where they wanted to go. They said ‘Leigh Park House – we work there’. ‘Fine’ said Sir Dymoke, ‘I haven’t been there since I was a boy’.

They thought he was going to drop them off at the entrance, but he wheeled the horses into the drive. The security guard leapt out of his box, the horses reared up and the guard scampered back into his box. Sir Dymoke then proceeded to gallop up the drive. The guard had obviously telephoned up to the house as the
Captain of the establishment and his underlings turned out. Sir Dymoke swept round the circular drive and pulled up. My two colleagues jumped off the back and scampered away. Sir Dymoke was taken into the house and given a drink, when it was discovered who he was.

In the winter, the staff would go tobogganing down the hill in front of the house to the lake, where, when it was frozen, ice-skating was permitted, as it had been for local residents when the Fitzwygram family were in residence. One rather large man was appointed ‘ice-tester’ and if he could go onto the ice, so could everyone else.

Local residents can remember when King George VI took the salute at Rowlands Castle from the forces mobilized for the D-Day invasion. Stories are also told of ammunition piled high on Stockheath Common and tanks assembled in preparation. Trees surrounding a field in the northern part of Leigh Park were felled to provide an emergency landing strip for aircraft.

The only damage suffered by Leigh Park in the war was a few bomb craters. Portsmouth, however, was far more seriously affected. There were sixty-seven German air raids between 1940 and 1944, which were aimed ostensibly at military installations but in effect left hideous scars throughout the city. The main shopping centre was completely obliterated, the Guildhall burnt to a shell, nearly 7,000 homes destroyed and 930 civilians killed.

Mrs Piper, who moved into this area in 1939 can recollect the impact of the Portsmouth blitz on the region:

_The first night, my husband was called up and I was left on my own, it was the first night of the Portsmouth blitz, July 11th 1940. It was ten minutes to seven, and all the lights went out because they’d hit the power station with the first bomb and Portsmouth and all around was blacked out. I sat here and I could hear the guns and all the things coming down. The ‘all clear’ went about nine o’clock, and I went out of the front door to have a look. The person next door was looking as well, it was as light as day with all the fires down there. Then the siren went again and we both dived indoors and it was all night again with the second wave._

_I’ll never forget the day after the Blitz, all these people were making their way along the land by the Belmont, Bedhampton. They were just walking out of Portsmouth. They didn’t know where they were going. They had blankets and things – they were just walking along. The old lady next door had a biggish family_
in Portsmouth. I think I had about five of them sleeping here in the next night, because they'd all come out to her and there wasn't enough room. People gradually went back to Portsmouth, they came out here every time they had a blitz and when they couldn't stay any longer, they would go back to see if their homes were all right.

Everybody was in the same boat, with their husbands away wondering whether they would return, and waiting for letters in the post, which were delivered three times daily by a middle aged woman on a bicycle. The woman shared their rations, two pints of milk a week each. Most adopted a vegetarian diet out of necessity. The 'Dig for Victory' campaign encouraged everyone to cultivate their gardens and produce enough vegetables to feed themselves.

Mrs Piper also had to do fire watching at night, pairs of women took it in turns working together.

_I can remember standing at the front door one night and a nightingale was trilling away singing along with the Crookhorn guns booming in the background. You had a lot of laughs and you had a lot of cries during the war. It was an experience._

The large number of people made homeless by the blitz attacks on Portsmouth, and the steady increasing number of returning service men, posed a serious housing problem for the area. One immediate solution was to use the old naval camps in Leigh Park. Some people used their own initiative and ‘squatted’ in the camps, simply because they had nowhere else to go. Other families were allocated huts by the local authorities.

There were five former bases in the area; Belmont Camp in Bedhampton where the naval church was converted to present day St Nicholas; one in the St Albans area of West Leigh; another near the site of Oak Park School; and a fourth in the woods above Dunsbury Way. Part of Fraser Camp is still standing and has been used for Stockheath School since the war.

The camps were not only occupied by Hampshire people. Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian refugees forced to flee Europe during the war, found themselves the responsibility of the British Government. As a boy, Ralph Cousins (local Sunday wholesale newspaper distributor) remembers seeing groups arrive at Havant Station. Although they were destitute, probably only owning what they stood up in, he and his friends were given money, now worthless, as they tried to speak with them.
They were housed in Fraser Camp, and local residents were invited to attend their celebrations and witness their singing, dancing and colourful dress. On one of these occasions a hand-made statue was unveiled in memory to their fellow countrymen lost in the war.

The Oak Park Camp is described as being surrounded by fencing with large entrance gates. These opened onto large brick buildings, presumably officers’ quarters. The remainder of the buildings were Nissen huts made with corrugated iron and concrete. Each had a bathroom/kitchen extension added before the families moved in; many people grew vegetables and kept pigs and chickens. Each hut had its own cess pit. Inside it was fairly spacious, comprising a large living room and two or three bedrooms. The heating was provided by black iron stoves which burned logs and coal, and needed frequent cleaning. Hot water was from an electric immersion heater. The electric meter had to be fed with old pennies.

The camp dwellers renovated the semi-derelict officers’ mess and used it as a family social club. They opened a bar, played bingo and ran a Sunday school for the children. Otherwise, they were dependant on entertainment, shopping and educational facilities provided by Havant. The 'Red Spot', 'Blue Spot' and ‘Textell' vans delivered groceries, meat and fish each week.

Local business men decided to open shops on the camp premises; at the Oak Park Camp it was Mr English as a butcher and Mr Cusworth as a newsagent and at the Stockheath Camp Mr and Mrs Piper as grocers.

*When we started the shop in Stockheath Camp, we saw these empty huts and wrote to the council asking if it would be possible to open a grocery store. There were so many people living in the Nissen huts without any facilities at all. After a while, the council gave us permission and we got in touch with the Food Ministry, as it was in those days. Food was still rationed and you couldn't get a permit to open a shop unless you had got at least fifty people to guarantee that they would register with you, because they all had ration books. So we had to go round all the camp’s Nissen huts and say 'look were going to open a shop if you'll promise to come and ration with us'.

There were some very poor people in the camp. I remember one little boy, about five-years-old, came into the shop. He had an empty jam jar. 'I want a penny's worth of vinegar, please Mr Piper’ he said. I took the jam jar, not thinking, I threw it up into the air but failed to catch it. It fell on the floor and broke into pieces, and
he cried his eyes out. 'What are you crying for' I said, 'I shan't get no tea now, you just broke my cup' he replied.

The former Stockheath Camp in Great Copse, where the Swallow public house and Tampax are now, was mostly in ruins, but its potential as a community centre was soon recognised. The old guard room was still intact, so early residents set to work cleaning, plastering and painting. It was soon the venue for a youth club and 'Ladies Night'. In the same area there was an International Youth Hostel where boys from Germany would visit, also use the swimming pool.

Like many other shops in the past, the Piper's Shop had a delivery round. Mr Piper remembers one of his elderly customers, a Mr Gusden, who had a market gardening site. One day Mr Piper went to deliver his order to find Mr Gusden standing at the gate (overlooking Leigh Park). He said:

See all those fields over there, they reckon their gonna build on that. It's all water meadows, gets flooded in the winter. They'll never be able to build on that.

Leigh Park and Portsmouth City Council

On Tuesday 26th October 1943, at a meeting of Portsmouth City Council, the first indications of Leigh Park's future were announced.

The Corporation's plan was to provide the returning service men of the Second World War, and their families, with a garden city to live in. The original idea was to build this 'Utopia' as a new town – the official definition being a completely separate community. Leigh Park – New Town was to be a group of 'villages' clustered around a central civic and shopping area. The official Portsmouth City Council record reads as follows:

On 26th October 1943, there had been a Meeting of the Council in Committee at which it was disclosed that in the previous July Councillor Storey had informed the Lord Mayor and the Chairman of the Finance Committee that he was in possession of information which might enable him to purchase, on behalf of the Corporation, all the land required for the Leigh Park satellite town, together with the green belt.

This opportunity was not likely to continue when more publicity had been given to the Council's proposals, and indeed in view of the mentions which had already been made, it would require extremely careful handling.

The report was published in the council minutes in February 1944 and continued:
Owing to the war-time restrictions on capital expenditure and the refusal of H.M. Government to consider schemes extending beyond one-year housing programme, there was great doubt whether the project could be carried into effect. Nevertheless the enormous advantage to the Corporation in preparing and carrying through their plans for the satellite town in owning the freehold in question seemed to justify every effort.

Accordingly a deputation consisting of the Lord Mayor, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, the Town Clerk, the City Treasurer, the Deputy City Architect and Councillor Storey waited upon the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and explained the proposal.

This was favourably received, but it became apparent that a large number of Ministries would be involved and the most serious obstacle would be the Treasury embargo. The City Treasurer was able to state that, owing to the curtailment of capital expenditure during the War, there was sufficient money available in the Consolidated Fund to cover the expenditure without recourse to borrowing.

In view of the stated policy of the Treasury this matter had to be referred for the personal decision of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Thanks to the expeditious handling of the matter by the Ministries concerned and their favourable co-operation, Treasury agreement was secured during August.

On the authority of the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Councillor Storey opened negotiations and when it became apparent that progress could be made, the matter was reported to that Committee who authorised Councillor Storey to continue negotiations on their behalf and agreed to indemnify him in respect of agency valuation and other professional fees which it might be necessary to incur. At the same time it was clear that before the purchase could be made, the matter would require the sanction of the Council.

Councillor Storey immediately proceeded with the negotiations, but great difficulty was experienced in securing contracts. Councillor Storey reported at a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee that he would be in a position to bring the whole matter to the Council at the Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 26th October, 1943, but he also had to report that one contract had been received and was ready for approval when he had received an intimation from the Vendors that they had heard of the Planning proposals, and that they declined to proceed. Councillor Storey at his own risk approved the contract, and tendered the deposit, but the Vendor refused to accept this. This misfortune illustrated very clearly the
difficulties of negotiating on behalf of the Local Authority, and it was clearly necessary for the highest degree of secrecy to be maintained.

The proposals provide for the acquisition by the Corporation of approximately 2,400 acres, bounded on the South by a line between Stockheath Lane and Denvilles, on the East by the main Southern Railway, on the North-East by the Emsworth-Horndean Road, on the North-West by Blendworth Common, and on the West generally by the Western boundary of the Havant and Waterloo Urban District, at a purchase price not exceeding £150,000 inclusive of costs:

Your Committee recommend:

1. That the action taken be confirmed and that Councillor Storey be authorised to endeavour to complete the purchase of the land referred to as agent for the Council, and that the Lord Mayor, the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Councillor Storey and the Town Clerk take all necessary steps to vest the freehold of the property in the Corporation.

2. That the City Treasurer be authorised to defray the costs of the purchase under the contracts secured by Councillor Storey, together with all legal and professional agency costs and expenses incurred by him.

3. That no further statement as to the acquisition of the land be made before a further Report from your Committee has been presented to the Council.'

The Report was accepted by the Council

The \textit{Evening News} reporting on the next Council meeting concerning Leigh Park, in February 1944, quoted Councillor Gammon as saying: \textit{It is the finest thing I have ever come across since I have been a member of this Council.}

In February 1944, the area that was to be bought was outlined, and the cost was estimated at approximately £123,000 for a total of 1,671 acres of parkland and the Leigh Park Mansion.

Leigh Park's position meant that Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council took a great interest in Portsmouth's proposal for developing the area. In October 1944 the council expressed surprise at the larger than first proposed plans for housing at Leigh Park. The Havant councillors, worried at the extent and implications of such a scheme, made a decision to oppose Portsmouth at every opportunity. This stand against Leigh Park right from the beginning was a probable contribution towards the longstanding antipathy between Havant
residents and the families that moved to Leigh Park. Portsmouth Corporation carried on with its' plan regardless of the discord emanating from Havant Chambers, and final purchase of the land was made in 1945.

The future of Leigh Park and its relation to the possible development of Portsmouth was discussed at a meeting of the Havant and Waterlooville Urban District Council on the 28th January.

In reply to a question as to why the City of Portsmouth had not submitted any plans of their proposed satellite town to the authorities in whose areas such town was proposed to be sited, it was stated that the Town Clerk of Portsmouth said that his council was not in a position to submit any detailed proposals at that time.

The council were informed that Councillor Storey, acting on behalf of the corporation, signed a contract for the purchase of Leigh Park House and adjoining land to an area of approximately 497 acres and that the purchase of this land had now been completed.

After further negotiations with the owners of the adjoining land, he had been able to exchange contracts for the purchase of a further 1,174 acres, making a total of 1,671 acres covering almost the whole of the area of the proposed satellite town, together with a 'green belt' to the south and west thereof.

The committee submitted a plan on which was shown the area of land, the purchase of which had been effected or for which other contracts had been signed. The site of the proposed satellite town was also indicated.

The owners of the remainder of the land referred to in the committee's report to the council in committee had refused to continue negotiations and accordingly Councillor Storey and the Town Clerk had a further interview with the Ministry of Town and Country Planning to report progress and to urge the ministry to use compulsory powers for the purchase of the 798 acres (approximately) in that ownership. The acquisition of this further 798 acres would complete the area of the new town (with the exception of the part lying to the east of the main London-Havant Railway), together with a forest area to the north, and would bring the total up to about 2,470 acres. It was anticipated that the total purchase price would be substantially below the figure authorised by the Council. The recommendations of the Finance and General Purposes Committee were approved but the acquisition of this area was never achieved.
Development of Leigh Park

Go Ahead Decision

PORTSMOUTH City Council will begin the development of the first section of Leigh Park at once, despite the fact that Petersfield Rural District Council have not consented to the scheme.

This was decided by the City Council, sitting in committee on Tuesday, when they adopted a recommendation of the Planning and Reconstruction Committee, saying that while appreciating the perplexities of the Petersfield Council, the contracts should be proceeded with and the Minister be asked to refer the application to himself for decision.

In a report, circulated by the Planning and Reconstruction Committee a few hours before the Council meeting, it was stated that formal application for the consent of Petersfield Rural Council to the development was made on June 10.

On August 11, the Petersfield Council gave notice that consideration of the application was postponed on the ground that the Council were not satisfied that the proposed development would be carried out immediately, if permission was granted.

Contractor Ready

In the meantime the Ministry of Health had approved the contract for the making of the roads and sewers, and the contractor was ready to commence at once.

A letter was addressed to the Clerk of Petersfield Council on August 29 stressing the urgency of the matter, and asking that consideration might again be given to the application at a meeting of that Council on Thursday of that week.

The matter, the report continued, was in fact brought before that Council at the meeting, but they felt unable to come to a decision ‘because of the uncertainty and confusion of the general election’.

*Evening News, September 1947*

The Max Lock Report

The first indications that Leigh Park was not going to be a 'garden city of the south' appeared in 1949 with the publication of the Max Lock Report. Mr Lock, the area Planning Consultant, was asked to do a report on the estate regarding its development in the future. Unfortunately Mr Lock came to the conclusion that Leigh Park was not needed as a separate New Town, and that Portsmouth City
Council should build only 800 houses and then hand over the area to Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council, who boundaries included Leigh Park. The Lord Mayor at the time was surprised by the conclusion and in a newspaper article, described Mr Lock’s views as: *The City’s worst setback so far as housing is concerned.*

**Leigh Park – New Town**

The report gave five reasons why large-scale development should be abandoned at Leigh Park:

- Capital costs should be as low as possible – £3½ million had already been spent on land acquisition and plans for the development.
- People who were moved should live in a happy and well-balanced community.
- Sufficient jobs could not be provided outside of Portsmouth Dockyard.
- Housing should be near industry.
- Leigh Park (plans) fail to fulfil the theoretical requirements of a New Town *(Evening News, 1 January 1949)*

Max Lock then stated further:

*New Towns must be balanced and self-contained, a proper mixture of class and income groups. It must be away from the influence of the parent town. We felt that no further development of Leigh Park, beyond the population of 5,000 should be proceeded with.*

It was also thought that developing Leigh Park to the level suggested would be far more expensive than the expansion and redevelopment of a site within Portsmouth.

Housing a potential of 30,000 people in the Leigh Park area would, the report said, aggravate considerably the journey to work problem. Max Lock did not believe that industry could be encouraged to move to the area as a solution for this.

Disagreements then started between Max Lock and the Planning Department. The Planning Officer, Mr Pratt, said he didn't know where Mr Lock had got the idea that Portsmouth had proposed that Leigh Park should be a New Town. It
was finally decided to implement the proposition that Leigh Park was no longer to be a New Town. The idea for handing over the scheme to Havant was conveniently ignored.

What did this mean in real terms to Leigh Park’s prospects? Whatever Portsmouth Corporation had originally stated – New Town, Satellite Town or Garden City – the plan was to build an independent community. It was to have had its own civic centre, shops, cinemas, leisure facilities and industry – self-sufficient but owned by Portsmouth.

When it lost its right to independent status, Leigh Park became essentially an area for overspill housing. The human needs of the City – lack of space, overcrowding and war damage – meant that Leigh Park had to develop as a functional community.

The corporation remained responsible for rents, and the duty of Havant Council was to collect rates, since Leigh Park was part of Havant Borough Council.

Therefore, the estate itself had no representatives on Portsmouth City Council, even though the Council was the 'landlord', and all sorts of problems were caused for Leigh Park as a result of this arrangement. The original plans for Leigh Park never came to fruition.

The cinema never appeared, nor did the civic centre and the outdoor swimming pool. Despite the inter-council wrangling and debates, families were moved out to Leigh Park from Portsmouth and had to live with the facilities made for them.

**Early Residents’ First Impressions – to us it was Paradise**

*My first impression of Leigh Park was that the freshness and the openness was like being set free. That was wonderful, the fresh air was marvellous. To us it was paradise. Another of my first memories is lying in my bed watching the field mice playing in my wardrobe.*

The Lord Mayor of Portsmouth cut the first turf in 1947, and within a matter of a few months the Leigh Park Estate received its’ new inhabitants.

The *Evening News* reported on what those first Leigh Parkers thought about their homes.

*My husband who had a nervous breakdown and had been off three months, started work today. The air out here has cured him* said Mrs Payne in May 1949. She said
of her 13-month-old daughter: *Just look at her now, she was always ill before we moved.* The baby was gurgling happily in her pram.

Mr Gardner was a chronic invalid unable to walk 100 yards before he moved to the estate. Helping his wife to fix a clothes line he declared:

*I feel like a different man now. If anyone refuses to accept a house out here they want their brains inspecting.*

Both Mrs Atkins and Mrs Ganter (who moved across from Layton Close, the former naval camp) also assented that they would not move back to the city.

*It costs my husband 1s 1p to get to work each day, said Mrs Atkins, and I don't mind admitting that it's a bit of a pinch. But then, I think it's worth it to have this freedom.*

Other comments were:

*It's smashing, if I get the chance, I will buy the house. I never want to go back to Fratton.*

*Consider all the modern conveniences we have, and the lovely surroundings. I could not wish for a better place to spend my remaining years.*

In 1949 the *Evening News* said:

*Many for the first time in their lives now know the invigorating feeling of breathing fresh country air, and the delight of picking bluebells within a stone’s throw of their front door.*

The atmosphere and 'feel' of the early estate was vastly different to that of today. The estate was much smaller. (Only 800 houses had been erected by 1949.) Early residents remember a 'village-like' atmosphere. Everyone banded together and began to make a life for themselves. People knew each other and if anyone had problems, neighbours would rally round and help. The early residents had mixed reactions to the early estate. Accustomed to the confined, grey, war-torn city that Portsmouth had become, whilst others revelled in the green open spaces and clean, fresh air, however, not everyone was enthusiastic about Leigh Park.

*It was a lonely life really – the children seemed to thrive on it though. The air was nice and all that. I felt a bit depressed though, coming up from Portsmouth. But we had to settle, well, I wasn't used to the countryside that's what it seemed to me,
coming out here.

I was very disappointed – well because we weren't warned that there were no shops and so on. We had no option but to take the place, as I was living in a room and my little boy was sleeping in a guest house.

I didn't think a lot of the place to be honest, because there was nothing, coming from London where there were plenty of shops for a start, and unless you went to Havant, which I often did, there were no shops to see. We had no pavements. The gardens were also in a terrible state, debris was 18” to 2ft high in front of our gardens.

Many of the early residents were moving into their first homes. The chronic housing shortage in Portsmouth meant that a large number of families had been living in bedsits, guest houses or with relatives. However, with building in progress, some didn't find what they expected.

We were so excited, being as it was our first house, we got a taxi that night and came out here. That did not give us a very good impression of the estate then. The main road was the road by the Cricketers public house. There were very few lights here and there, just concrete roads. Eventually we found the house. We went in – no electric lights, the painters were still there; some of the paint was still wet, but we were given the keys to move in the following week.

The bus came along Bedhampton Way and stopped. We thought the houses looked like dolls’ houses. We moved into Bramdean Drive, which was like living in the middle of a field. It was so quiet and I remember lots of us walking through the mud carrying brooms and buckets to clean our new house.

I liked the house because it was roomy. My husband had a garden which he liked, and I liked my neighbours. I liked the people, in fact I loved everything about it.

Living on Leigh Park meant a change in lifestyle for the former city dwellers. As well as trying to adapt themselves to the differences in living conditions and the isolation of their new homes, the inhabitants had to contend with the continuous building which made the conditions of the roads memorable to say the least.

The house was literally on its’ own with no roads or pavements. Just plenty of mud. You were marching around in Wellington boots practically all the time. There were no proper roads at all – and mud was everywhere. Of course, don't forget at that time there was a lot of building going on, all the way around the estate, so that
everywhere you went there was a new site on or to be started. You could take long walks, but as I say it was a while before we had pavements and all. The children had to have their Wellington boots on of course.

Travelling back and forth to Portsmouth meant a particular routine.

I remember specifically our foot-wear procedure while we travelled to Portsmouth. We wore our 'Wellie' boots until we were past the Cricketers in Riders Lane because of the mud. Then we would take them off and put them in a bag in the babies pram, as we had to walk to the station at Bedhampton or Havant to get to Portsmouth. Then on the way home we would reverse the procedure of shoes and boots on returning.

It was difficult getting to work as there was one bus an hour, which at that time was the only bus you could catch. You would have to wear your Wellingtons in Leigh Park and take your decent shoes in a bag on the bus. It was like you were going to a difficult climate altogether it was only a single decker bus that used to come up here – I think it came about every hour or so. The bottom of Riders Lane was always in flood every winter and the little bus couldn't get through. He used to have to go the other way because of the water at the bottom of Riders Lane where the stream is.

We had to walk over the bridge into Riders Lane, down into Stockheath Lane along the river to Bedhampton Crossing Gates, where we would catch the bus at 6.40 a.m. to go to school. The next morning bus wasn't until 10.30 a.m.

The infrequent bus service to Leigh Park in those days also meant that although we came out of school at 4.30 p.m. we had to sit and wait until 7 p.m. for the return bus home. All this made my brother and I decide to ride our bicycles to and from St Lukes each day for the remainder of our schooldays.

As for transport, everyone had bicycles. There was one bus every two hours which stopped right outside my house. We came out to see the bus that stopped in Botley Drive; that was as far as it went. We went out of the house; it was evening time and there was the bus. We went dashing over to get the bus, there was the conductor and driver sitting there. They gave us a strange look and said 'you know you've got a long wait. After 6.40 p. m. it was an hourly service. It was November, so we had to wait for ages in the cold.

Coming home from Portsmouth was even worse because people used to get on the bus for Copnor, Cosham or Farlington and with the bus being only once an hour all
the people making short journeys would keep those who wanted to go to Leigh Park off the bus. Some of the conductors were alright and gave priority to those who were going all the way. But most of the time you were left to try and catch any bus going Farlington way, where you then had to wait for the next Leigh Park bus. That turned out to be the easiest way in the end, although it mucked up your return tickets. It cost a few pennies more but you were certain of a bus that wouldn't be so full up and you could get a seat.

One other major problem for the first families was the isolation from their 'home' town of Portsmouth. Having lived there most of their lives, many maintained their links with Portsmouth. Children had to go to school in Portsmouth, and many people kept their jobs in Portsmouth, even though they had moved so far away.

The transport provision for these continuing links was limited. In days when a car was a luxury item, afforded by only a minority, public transport was the only way to travel back and forth to Portsmouth.

Apart from the local Southdown service to and from Havant our only way into Portsmouth was by rail from Havant, or a Portsmouth Corporation bus.

The Corporation M/N bus service [M for the out journey N for the return] turned off New Road into Stockheath Lane. It then travelled down Riders Lane and turned left into what is now Purbrook Way but was then called Botley Drive. It then drove about 500 yards and went round the bend into what is now Botley Drive proper and then up to Middlepark Way which was the end of the line and if you did not live within those bounds the only way home was, as my mother used to say, by shanks' pony. I just didn't bother using public transport as it was so unreliable. We used to walk everywhere.

[The part of Purbrook Way then called Botley Drive from Dunsbury Way to Botley Drive today was changed to Purbrook Way about 1952 when the curve was taken out and Botley Drive became a junction with Purbrook Way when it was extended to Barncroft Way. Also Leigh Park was called Stockheath; my parent’s address was 58 Botley Drive, Stockheath, Petersfield, Hants. It then changed to 58 Purbrook Way, Leigh Park, Havant, Hants. No. 60 Botley Drive, next door to us, and the other side of the alley leading to Eversley Crescent, became No. 2 Botley Drive. Bob Hind]

As can be seen from their comments, the early residents were generally pleased to be out of Portsmouth. Considering the state of the city and the length of time it took the Council and other interested parties to rebuild Portsmouth, it is hardly
surprising. Most of post-war Portsmouth was bleak and rubble strewn. Overcrowding was common and the conditions in some areas were abysmal. In some cases people's health was suffering, the move to Leigh Park was, more than anything a relief.

The houses were new, and contained such luxuries as indoor toilets. But it soon became clear that there was a sense of isolation. The public transport provision was inadequate and it was difficult to get anywhere for shopping and entertainment. This was a spur for the development of 'community spirit' and 'self-help'. There was no television, the nearest cinema was at Havant, and other amenities were only available in Portsmouth. While Leigh Park was quite compact initially, as it grew, these schemes became less feasible.

The conditions of the estate varied. As a result of the continuing building programme, the idyllic country surroundings could change from a boggy quagmire in winter when the roads were rutted with mud to a dust bowl in the summer which hindered the success of the weekly wash. In the winter the surface water drainage problems that dogged the building programme caused large areas to become temporary swampland making travel by foot difficult, and sometimes impossible, especially to mothers pushing their children in prams or push-chairs.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that these inconveniences overwhelmed the new population. Far from it! Accustomed to war time austerity, the move to Leigh Park was literally a breath of fresh air. The comparative comfort of the new houses, the chance of new life and the beautiful surroundings were very welcome. It must have seemed that previous years of war and rationing (the latter continued to 1954) and been worth it. From the interviews it can be seen that the men and women were grateful for their new start.

There were some doubts brought about by change, but the near universal view was of approval for the Leigh Park estate.

Community Development

As quickly as the houses at Leigh Park were erected, the homeless families – victims of blitzed Portsmouth – were moved in. It can be categorically stated that they moved to an area where there was nothing – except countryside. There were no roads, shops or laundry facilities. The sewage and drainage system were still under construction and some of the houses were devoid of basic
requirements including electricity, such was the pressing need to re-house.

*There were no pavements, no shops – it was all country. There was nothing here, nothing at all. It was all rough roads, no street lights – in the winter it was very rough going.*

Many official grandiose plans and proposals had been made to develop the estate but far too few of these materialized. The controversy between the various authorities over the official status of Leigh Park resulted in a lot of discord and there was also the matter of finance! The ratepayers did not want to be financially burdened unnecessarily. Leigh Park grew into an enormous housing estate of ‘an amorphous character’ separate from the privately owned housing estates in Havant, Bedhampton and Waterlooville, and the residents of Leigh Park soon became aware of this isolation.

It was originally hoped to create 'a well-balanced town with a healthy social life'. Whatever happened?

*As regards entertainment there was absolutely nothing whatsoever. The entertainment we got was by walking through the rhododendron woods. There were lovely woods up there at that time.*

*I had two favourite walks. One was to Horndean Holt, crossing the fields and lanes to get there and the other was to Leigh Park House. The drive was about two or three miles long then, and avenue of trees including oak and elm formed an arch above it. The Warren was all fields and lanes – one could walk all the way to Cowplain.*

*Where the Barncroft Way shops were later built there was a lovely pond with kingfishers flying above. This would be passed on the walk from Park Lane, past the Hooks Lane Farm, over a stile, across the field, over the bridge at Hermitage Stream and down the pathway which led to the Cricketers pub.*

The bicycles that people used to travel to work also provided family entertainment. With one child on each of the parents' bicycles, they would travel through the countryside to the Stansted estate. There wasn't much else to do except chat over the garden fence or watch the television. Most of the families had little money to spare, and consequently when a family acquired a new piece of furniture or a television the neighbours came round and congratulated them.

*It was quite funny really because when anybody got any new furniture everyone
would go round and have a look, more like a 'furniture warming' that a 'house warming'. I remember the whole street coming in to see our first new carpet. They all stood round and admired it!

When Queen Elizabeth was crowned in 1953 'open house' was declared by people with a television, so that day in their front rooms it was standing room only. The Coronation was also an excuse for street parties and countless other celebrations.

There was an atmosphere of sharing and togetherness in those early years – a true community spirit.

When the estate was in its infancy the only place where the new residents could meet was at the Cricketers Tavern – the one and only public house (dating back to 17th century). There was a hut next to the Cricketers which was used for many activities not least being Sunday worship as the churches had not yet been built. This hut became the focal point for all social activity, and a familiar meeting place to all.

The pub was the focal point. I mean it was the only pub I would ever go to without my husband, because to me it wasn't so much a pub, but a place where you met your neighbours and friends. It was the only place we went. We had a Young Wives thing where we would take the children once a week and have a gossip.

The Saturday night social at the Cricketers was the main local attraction. Entry was free and people took turns to entertain.

Lennie Burton did an Al Jolson impression, Ted Fletcher sang Australian songs and there were competitions – guessing the number of peas in a jar, for example, for the prize of a cake. There was never any 'trouble'.

Community activity was born out of necessity. The residents being many miles from Portsmouth had little choice but to entertain themselves.

A Young Wives Group was started by a Mrs Wilson from Rowlands Castle. The members of this group embarked on presenting a series of variety shows at the Cricketers, which were extremely well received by the entertainment-starved residents of the new estate. The Variety Group moved their productions to St Francis Church Hall when it was built but, renamed 'The Goldenaires' are now based at the community centre. This group must be one of the few remaining groups originally formed on the new estate.
Provisions for health care on the estate were virtually non-existent. A small clinic was opened in the Cricketers hut where mothers could obtain orange juice, milk, cod-liver oil and vitamins, for their children. They could also register the birth of their children here.

To see a doctor the residents had to trek through the mud to Havant or Bedhampton. The building of surgeries was sadly omitted in the early development of the Estate. As a result of the difficulty for new residents in being accepted by dental surgeons, a caravan was provided for the school dentist so that the children at least received regular dental checks.

The role of the church was very important in the early days. By holding interdenominational services at the Cricketers Hut it was hoped to draw people together on a regular basis. It was not until the mid-1950s that each denomination had their own place of worship.

When St Francis Church cum hall was first built, many regular events were moved from the Cricketers to this new site. Like the hut, the hall became multi-functional and therefore became the new focal point of the estate.

As well as becoming the more permanent venue for Anglican worship, the hall was used as a welfare clinic, a dancing school, an old folks club and a theatre. The Young Wives Group initiated the Deanery pancake race which was held every year in Riders Lane. What was originally planned as an afternoon's social entertainment became a very popular event with young wives from other local parishes taking part. A shield was purchased for presentation to the winner and enthusiasm for joining in was so great that elimination heats were held in the parishes’ weeks before pancake-day.

During and after the war there had been a naval prison camp where the Swallow public house is now situated. Local enterprising youngsters used the old guard room (which was still standing after the war) as a youth club.

There was also a derelict cinema in the old army camp and I used to spend hours watching the squirrels who had nests in the uprights and rafters. There was also an International Youth Hostel there and we had a lot of boys visiting from Germany.

The regular members of the youth club were taught boxing by PC Lock who was the first and only local policeman in Leigh Park. Competitions were held with other youth clubs in surrounding areas.
Another popular pastime was the hunting of rabbits and squirrels in the woods near Stockheath Lane. The council paid one shilling per tail to the successful hunters. For those who wanted more of a challenge there were foxes in the Warren, and plenty of rats and moles to be disposed of around harvest time on the farms.

By the mid-1950s more permanent organisations for young people were being established. Guiding, Scouting and Brownie groups were formed and the churches' own youth organisations became very popular. In 1957 the Boys and Girls Brigade were inaugurated at Botley Drive Methodist Church, and that same year a boys’ archery club was set up by Leigh Park Baptist Church with instruction given by their minister, himself an accomplished archer. The Anglican Church set up the Point Seven Youth Centre at the corner of Middle Park Way and Purbrook Way to cater for the 'unattached youth' of the estate who merely wished to sit and talk, play records, or drink coffee. A Youth Officer was appointed to help work out personal problems and other difficulties. Point Seven drives its name from being built on 0.7 of an acre.

In spite of these activities, the continued expansion of the estate meant that entertainment was so severely lacking. There were a few public houses and lots of open space and fresh air which although a novelty in itself was insufficient to sustain interest. There were no social amenities provided because the authorities felt that there were adequate facilities in the surrounding towns – especially in Havant. A cinema was planned for the estate by Portsmouth City Council decided that they could not fund it themselves. Although they tried to persuade a private company such as Rank to build one – it was eventually felt that a cinema in Leigh Park would not be commercially viable. An open air swimming pool was also envisaged but alas the plan never came to fruition.

The residents continued to provide whatever entertainment they could for the community, and in time the Leigh Park Community Association came into being.

One Sunday morning, I remember, we went round the doors giving out a printed leaflet stating we were having a meeting in the hut next to the Cricketers. After the meeting we had a dance. We had a three piece band for which we had built a stage. That was the beginning of the Leigh Park Community Association. We began to build up the club, organising dances, whist drives, garden fêtes, fireworks displays, children’s Christmas parties etc. and after a while we joined British Communities Association.
Churches

One of the problems which confronted the newcomers was the lack of provision for formal worship as the nearest churches were in Bedhampton or Havant. It was decided to use the hut adjacent to the Cricketers public house for Sunday services. This venue was sometimes difficult to accept by the more staunch members of some faiths. However, the hut became the focal point of the estate and many groups originated there. One of the more well-known and successful groups was the St Francis Young Wives Variety Group (now known as the Goldenaires). They entertained the residents with a varied programme including a Black and White Minstrel Show and the play *Night Must Fall*, which received good reviews in both the *Evening News* and the *Hampshire Telegraph*.

In 1952 the Church of England formed a Conventional District of part of the estate and Revd H Guernsey was offered the appointment of Priest-in-Charge. As there was no permanent place of worship, and the council would not provide him with a house, Revd Guernsey had to conduct services in a variety of venues including people’s homes and a Scout Hut in a former naval camp. After two years Revd Guernsey became ill and his place was taken by Revd J Beaumont who was married and managed to obtain a council house, one of the bedrooms of which he converted into a permanent chapel.

On 12 November 1954 The Bishop of Portsmouth consecrated St Francis church hall in Riders Lane and at last the Church of England fellowship had a place of their own in which to worship. The church-cum-hall was designed both as a church and as a building to serve the local community. Many of the groups and activities which were held in the Cricketers hut moved to St Francis church hall including the bi-weekly welfare clinic to which a pilgrimage was made from all over the estate for orange juice and family medical matters.

Less than two months later the Roman Catholic community celebrated the dedication of their new chapel in Dunsbury Way. The dedication of the Chapel of the Blessed Margaret Pole was carried out by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth and the new building was welcomed by the 700 strong Roman Catholic community who, since 1951 had been worshipping in a Nissen hut.

The Methodists were now the only religious community still using the Cricketers hut for a combined Sunday School and church service. The Baptists worshipped in an old farm house on the corner of Blendworth Crescent.
Fund raising for building a Methodist Church continued, and in September 1956 the Botley Drive Methodist church was officially opened having been built as an exact copy of the church hall at Drayton Methodist Church.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist communities now had a church or hall of their own in which to worship, but the Baptists were still left without a dedicated house of God. Due to increasing numbers the services had to be moved from the farm house to Trosnant School.

In May 1957 after much planning, fund-raising and hard work the Leigh Park Baptist Church in Stockheath Road was opened. To mark the link with the original Lake Road Baptist Church in Portsmouth, which had been badly damaged during the war, building stones from the original church inscribed 'Landport Baptist Church (1865)' were laid in the entrance hall of the new church.

Although the religious communities in the centre of Leigh Park were now catered for, there was no such provision at West Leigh. Sunday worship necessitated a long trek through the mud either across the estate to the new churches or down through the estate to Havant. The Rector of Havant, realising the need to minister to his new parishioners in West Leigh, started a Sunday school in the galley of a former naval camp in St Albans Road.

From this small beginning emerged the idea of a new church which would be the daughter of St Faith’s church in Havant. A small band of volunteers worked hard to transform the galley into what was to become the much loved little church of St Albans, West Leigh, which was consecrated by the Bishop of Portsmouth on 7 April 1957.

All the churches played an important part in developing the community spirit in Leigh Park. The feelings of isolation experienced by some of the new residents were largely dispelled by the sterling work of the first ministers on the estate. Various self-help community organisations were formed and meetings of all kinds were held in the newly acquired church halls.

In 1957 the Boys and Girls Brigade in Botley Drive Methodist Church were formed and in the other churches similar activities for the young people began. The St Francis Young Wives staged an annual pancake race in Highclere Avenue in which most young wives of the Havant Deanery participated. There were youth clubs, mothers clubs, dancing clubs etc. all of which helped to promote
feelings of happiness and well-being on the estate.

Thus, ten years after the first people settled in Leigh Park, the members of several religious persuasions had a church or hall of their own in which to continue the pursuit of their beliefs. Although it was to be sometime before building began more permanent structures the provision of these temporary houses of worship gave the residents something on which to focus, and a sense of belonging.

**Schools**

Although Portsmouth City council built the majority of houses and most amenities on the Leigh Park estate, the provision of schools in the area is not their responsibility. This was under the auspices of the Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council, which had its own education office and education officer. Certain functions were delegated by Hampshire County Council, who retained ultimate authority. There was an education committee comprised of members of the local council, teachers, representatives of churches and other local organisations.

The office in Havant dealt with the day to day administration of the schools, appointment of teachers, school meals and transport. Payment was through the Havant office, but the money came from Winchester, who had to buy the land from Portsmouth City Council which had been designated for school building in the outline plans for the development of the estate.

The steadily increasing numbers of families that moved into both renovated Nissen huts and newly built houses in Leigh Park were dependent on the existing Havant, Purbrook and Portsmouth schools.

Special school buses were not made available until 1951, so, in the immediate post-war years, pupils had to either use their feet, the inadequate public bus service, or their bicycles to get to school each day.

At HMS *Daedalus* III Camp an annex of two classrooms in disused buildings was opened in 1950. This provided schooling for approximately 40 children between the ages of five and eight. Classes were held in very rudimentary conditions – there was no electric lighting, water was heated on a primus stove and the playground was the road outside. The school dinners were brought from the British Restaurant in Havant each day until the camp kitchen was adapted.
Blackboards and chalks were used and aural methods of teaching. Only the older children were given exercise books – sheets of sugar paper were cut into pieces and both sides were used. News books were made from newsprint and wallpaper pattern books.

In July 1951 it was announced that £41,450 was available for a primary school to cater for 560 children; to be built in Kingsclere Avenue.

In a letter to the County Education Authority two months later, Mr J Cross Secretary of Conservative and Unionist Branch, asked what progress had been made towards the starting of schools sanctioned for erection.

*The many problems and difficulties created by the absence of such an essential public need, causes great concern to the residents of Leigh Park.*

A recent statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer had stated that all new building projects should be postponed for two or three months and so, building began in January 1952. Riders County Infant School eventually opened exactly two years later. Plans and funds were approved for a junior school to be built on the same site.

By February 1954, seventeen acres had been allocated for the building of Oak Park Secondary Modern School in Leigh Road. This met with local protests, people felt that some of the land should continue to be used for agricultural purposes, not playing fields, even though it met the stipulated acreage for a school of that size determined by the Ministry of Education.

The growing number of children in Leigh Park imitated a general trend; from 1947 to 1954 the number of school children in Hampshire had increased from 67,000 to 90,000.

The need to relieve stress on Havant schools was acknowledged, when it was declared in May that year that five more Leigh Park schools would soon be provided. The stress was then transferred to the ratepayers’ pockets due to the increase in county rates.

The first of these schools to open was Barncroft County infant School in 1955. It met with widespread approbation from teaching, domestic staff and children alike. All were very impressed by the sense of freedom and airiness in the modern, purpose-built nine classrooms. All the furniture and fittings in the airy, warm rooms were scaled to size. After her first day one little girl said that she
thought it was 'lovely', and the headmistress found it reminiscent of the days she had spent teaching in a school in Singapore.

Trosnant Junior School followed similar 'non-traditional' lines. Accent in the building was on gay colour, big windows and spaciousness. All door surrounds were lined with pastel coloured tiles.

The school accommodated for 400 children of both infant and junior school ages when it opened in May 1956, until Trosnant Infant was completed. Many of them were attending school for the first time, but the majority had been transferred from other schools where there had been overcrowding.

Perhaps the statement in the 1944 Education Act that Social Education Authorities had a *responsibility to contribute to the spiritual, mental and physical development of the community*, contributed strongly to the decision made by the headmaster, Mr John W Hunt, to form a Parent Teacher Association which would *bat on a social wicket rather than an educational one*. It organised many social and fund raising activities, compensating somewhat for the lack of community centre provision in the 1950s.

Front Lawn County Infant School and St Thomas More Roman Catholic School opened their doors in the same week in May 1957. This meant that Leigh Park now had eleven schools (the others being Stockheath Primary, Riders Junior Riders Infant, Barncroft Junior, Barncroft Infant, Trosnant Junior, Trosnant Infant and Oak Park County Secondary for boys).

Before Leigh Park house was demolished in 1959, proposals had been made that it should be used for a Grammar School, and a Technical College built on the site between New Road and Stockheath Lane.

However, this did not prove viable and it was decided the new building should be for the grammar school. An *Evening News* report in March 1956 stated that the proximity of Portsmouth Dockyard and allied shipbuilding industry would probably play an important part in deciding the specialized type of education to be provided by the new school, with a strong bias towards science and engineering.

Three more schools were in the course of completion. Front Lawn Junior, Broomfield Secondary Modern and St Albans Church of England School.

A door to door census was carried out in Leigh Park which asked for details of
the ages and number of children in each household. The Hampshire Educational Authority reported that the census was being taken to guide any future planning of schools in the area.

**Shops**

Although Portsmouth Corporation has an energetic building programme this did not seem to include the provision of shops. There was in fact a small grocery shop at each end of the estate in the former naval camps, but these were inadequate to serve the rapidly enlarging area.

Shopping expeditions by the early residents were made by foot to Havant and by bus to Portsmouth. Difficulties were encountered whichever trip the residents chose to make. The buses, besides being few and far between, were usually filled by passengers travelling to destinations en route to Leigh Park laden with shopping, small children and push-chairs etc. still waiting at the bus stop. They would sometimes have to wait nearly two hours before they could board a bus for home.

Going into Havant was also a chore. The residents had to don Wellington boots because of the mud and were something to behold when they reached the shops.

*To get to Havant shops, I used to push two children in a push chair and one on a tricycle. It made you a very good housewife, you didn’t forget the Oxo cubes or the reel of cotton, not if you had to go all the way into Havant for them.*

Apart from pillar boxes and telephone kiosks there were no Post Office facilities – no stamp machines, no way of registering letters, no way for the service wife to collect the family allowance except – again – at Havant.

*If you wanted a stamp or anything at the Post Office you had to go into Havant. Most of us had prams and pushchairs and we all had to wear wellie boots because of the mud.*

Some enterprising people used to provide a small retail service in their own homes.

*Mr English, the Butcher and Mr Cusworth the newsagent and tobacconist, both lived on the Estate then and used to sell goods from their homes.*

*In a house near Hazelholt Drive a woman used to sell bread, milk, sweets etc. from her front room and in her garden shed on a Sunday a barber used to cut hair. The*
men used to play cards while they were waiting.

Several traders, realising the marketing potential of this infant estate, began a mobile shopping service which called round all the houses.

As we had no shops we would queue up for the vans – the queues were worse than the queues in the shops.

A Mr Cobbins had a horse and cart on which he used to bring greengroceries round. He finally bought a van and later his son used to come round. A Mr Holmes also used to go round the houses with a bread basket on his bicycle.

There was a variety of traders which enabled the early residents to depend less on making the long trek through the mud to Havant for their shopping but there were drawbacks.

After a while the vans started coming round. That was a big help but of course they charged a lot. We had the mobile fish van, the mobile grocer and the Co-op van which often visited Gosport and Paulsgrove too so often didn’t arrive until 10 p.m. on a Saturday evening. We had a mobile hardware van, and a mobile gents’ hairdresser.

We had practically everything come round door-to-door. Most people used to get stuff and pay for it later. There was a knife grinder and a muffin van amongst the usual grocers that used to come round.

On one occasion the Morgan the mobile greengrocer was stranded in his van, when the stream overflowed. He was waist deep in water and all his vegetables floated off the van. We had to find a dry change of clothes for him.

On every day of the week dozens of mobile vans could be seen plying their wares on the estate. Each van was identifiable by a loud musical klaxon horn. There was a certain amount of trust involved too. Some people would go out and leave a shopping list and money on the doorstep for the trader when he arrived.

Realising the need for more permanent shopping facilities, planning permission was obtained and the first four shops were opened in Stone Square on 10 January 1952. These comprised a butcher, a newsagent, a Spar shop and a chemist. Ten thousand people had already moved into the estate by this time.

I used to go up there because in those days you could buy small amounts and you weren’t very well off. You could go and get two ounces of tea, a single stamp, razor
blade or battery and perhaps one or two eggs which you can't do now.

The new chemist's shop in Stone Square was visited once a week by an optician who used a room at the back as a consulting room. This gave the residents a chance to see an optician locally rather than travel all the way into Havant or Portsmouth.

In 1952 plans were put forward for a main shopping centre at the junction of Dunsbury Way and Stockheath Road with one hundred new shops, a cinema and a service garage. Five acres were to be reserved for a civic centre with various administration offices to run Leigh Park.

Unfortunately this plan was not met with approval by the South East Hants Planning Committee. The Area Planning Officer said that the proposal would permanently divide the Havant and Leigh Park communities.

Everything should be done to weld Havant and Leigh Park into one so there should be no divided loyalties.

Whilst the arguments about a main shopping centre continued a small terrace of shops was opened both in Barncroft Way and Botley Drive. The newsagent in Barncroft Way was Les Constable, an ex-serviceman who had been blinded in the war. Messrs Burnett and Piper joined forces and opened a grocery shop. The Botley Drive shop was run by Jack Cusworth who had set up a shop in a Nissen hut in the West Leigh camp.

A small Post Office was included in the Botley Drive shop which meant a great reduction in travel to Havant. At last the purchase of a stamp did not mean a long miserable wellie-clad trek through the mud.

As a result of successful negotiations, plans for a much reduced shopping centre on the original site were approved, the building of which began in 1955. The news that Leigh Park was to have its own shopping complex was received enthusiastically by local house wives.

We welcome a shopping centre out here. I do some of my shopping in Havant but you do not get the variety you can have in Portsmouth. Having shops here will cut out the travelling. It will be nice to have our own shopping centre but I will miss the vans. The people are so friendly.

The variety of shops meant that Leigh Park had practically become self-sufficient. Several of the more well-known stores were represented including
Woolworths, Liptons, Pinks and the Co-op.

Initially there was also a Post Office in the Centre Newsagency owned by Ted Thomas but this later moved into the purpose built Crown Office. Lloyds Bank and the National Westminster Bank also opened branches.

Although Wellington boots were still needed to cope with the mud created by the continuing building on the estate, a family shopping trip became far less of a chore.

However, the introduction of these facilities was too few too late and there is still a genuine need for better facilities. There has always been a call for a large department store, for instance. This lack of shopping amenities was the result of trying to build much needed housing and a miscalculated attempt to unite Havant and Leigh Park. It could be argued that there is still scope for improvement and hopefully there will be.

**Employment**

The original plan for Leigh Park was to build a self-sufficient community. Not only did the Corporation have to plan for houses and shops, they also had to provide employment for the eventual inhabitants of Leigh Park to fulfil this ideal.

In the master-plan for the estate, employment was envisaged for 4,400 people on a site of 55 acres, with *a good range of employment for both sexes and all ages*.

Again, as with many of the Corporation's proposals, the Max Lock Report was not so enthusiastic about Leigh Park's industrial future.

The report agreed that the industrial site adjoining the main railway line might attract a reasonable quantity of industry in time. It did not recognise however, that, business and professional interests would be drawn to the location in any large numbers. It was pointed out that the people already housed in Leigh Park would have to rely on jobs provided in Portsmouth. A tradition of travelling to work in Portsmouth was established, proving difficult to modify in the following years. These points were to be proved correct in relation to the time it took the industrial estate to be established, and the dependence of Portsmouth Dockyard.

During the first few years, industry was reluctant to move to the Leigh Park area due to the unavailability of a large enough work force. The only employment for inhabitants of the early estate, therefore, was Portsmouth Dockyard. Strong links
were maintained with Portsmouth during the formative years as many of the men who were moved to Leigh Park came from Portsmouth and already worked in the Dockyard. This meant commuting daily to Portsmouth:

*My husband worked in the Dockyard and he had to cycle back and forth since the bus service was non-existent.*

*I cycled to the Dockyard every day in all weathers, and several times in icy conditions. Then, I sometimes decided to catch the bus to Bedhampton railway station, it being too risky to ride a bicycle. I would say about 60% of the men out here worked in the Dockyard in the late forties. We used to gather in Chalton Crescent and to to work together (when weather was nice) on our bicycles.*

*When I used to cycle to Portsmouth, I had to get up at 5.30 a.m. and take my children to the nursery – people could tell the time by me then. I used to work in the Dockyard. I would drop the children off and cycle to the Dockyard. We would wave to the ships. I would get back to Leigh Park to pick up the children at about 6 o'clock in the evening.*

The Dockyard at Portsmouth remained the dominant employer of those in Leigh Park for many years. It provided more apprenticeships to the labour force than did local industry and although it was quite a distance to travel each day, large numbers of people preferred to work there.

Situated in a 'green-belt' location close to a railway station and near enough main roads to be linked in with the national road system, the industrial estate at Leigh Park was in an advantageous site for the attraction of light industry. As the populace grew, industrialists also had a large pool of labour to hand, especially within the female population of Leigh Park.

In 1956, however, the *Evening News* ran a report under the heading: 'Men Need Jobs at Factories'.

It spoke of the expected number of jobs at Leigh Park's industrial estate as being approximately 2,700, when all the projects materialized. Two thousand of these jobs were expected to be filled by women and young, single girls. Concern was expressed by some in the Portsmouth Council. Those responsible for bringing industry into the area hoped that the Board of Trade would introduce more male employment in the area. The majority of industries that planned to move, or were already established, tended to employ women for unskilled assembly work.
During the 1950s, Portsmouth City Council received applications from companies to move into the Leigh Park area. These included: International Chemical Company, Minimodels, Plessey, Havant Sheet Metal, Vinatex (now Norsk Hydro Polymers) and Tampax.

The statistics of workers in Leigh Park in 1956 ran as follows:

- 70% of Leigh Park workers travelled more than four miles to work.
- 14% worked at Portsmouth Dockyard
- 10% were servicemen
- 30% worked in Portsea Island of the 15% who are building workers, about half are employed on the Estate.

After ten years, an industrial estate of 40 acres had finally established itself.

Four factories were already in production with two under construction. About 400 people were employed, with the number rising to 1,300 within a few months after four more projects had been negotiated.

Two years later, however, the Evening News reported: No work – So Many People Quit Leigh Park.

People were flocking back to Portsmouth from Leigh Park because there was no work on the new estate for them. At the South East Hampshire Area Planning Committee meeting in Fareham it was reported: Houses are becoming empty because people have nowhere to work.

This report was perhaps a little extreme, but industry that was attracted to Leigh Park could not possibly be sufficient, to give on-the-spot employment to the vast numbers of people moving into the Leigh Park estate.

Eventually, the majority of sites were developed. Unfortunately, however, a trend was quickly established by companies which enforced either sharp cuts or rapid increased in recruitment and production in response to changes in the economy. This, combined with the established trend for workers to be employed outside Leigh Park, and the fact that the majority of those who did work and live on the estate resulted in an unstable industrial future for Leigh Park.

**Summary**

Leigh Park continued to develop and expand after 1957. The Warren, West Leigh and the Greywell Shopping Precinct were yet to come. After these areas were
built however, the population of the estate had reached 40,000.

The estate nevertheless, has never been completed in such a way as to match the original concept held by Portsmouth City Council back in 1943. Comparison between the Leigh Park of today – with its shops, one community centre, a heavily over-subscribed working men's club and a few public houses – and the Utopian ideal of the forties, leaves us asking why the plan did not succeed. The sheer numbers of homeless people needing accommodation after the war and during the 1950s meant that housing became Portsmouth Corporation's first priority. Over-crowding on Portsea Island had reached a critical level and the Paulsgrove estate was insufficient as an overspill area, as were inner-city redevelopment schemes. Planning for facilities at Leigh Park therefore had to take a less important role, and so right from the beginning the estate was neglected.

To compensate for the lack of facilities for the rapidly expanding community, the idea was put forward to develop Havant more, and link the two communities together.

Well intentioned though this might have been, it was another blow to the chance that Leigh Park might gain any sense of independence. When proposals were put forward for facilities to serve Leigh Park, it was decided to site them in Havant as re-development there had already begun. Amenities such as a leisure centre, and more recently a new health centre, were therefore based in the Havant area. Instead of joining Havant and Leigh Park together as one community, these plans only served to further isolate the estate and its inhabitants. Having little as a main focal point, Leigh Park has become merely a large extension of Havant.

Another reason for the failure of the original ideas was the lack of representation afforded to Leigh Park on Portsmouth City Council. With Leigh Park representatives on the council, things may have been different. The people of Leigh Park have taken an interest in things that affect them. The rent marches, strikes and controversy over Leigh Park Gardens have shown this. There is a Joint Council Committee dealing with Leigh Park, but the estate's residents have had their hands tied. They do not have a voice in the Portsmouth Council, which is after all their 'landlord'.

Since building began on Leigh Park, the only obvious change over the years has been its increase in size.
The character of Leigh Park, however, is beginning to change. The label it has been given in the past of being a rough and socially deprived area is no longer wholly applicable. Although Leigh Park is still no better off for such things as social amenities, the underlying trend is one of change.

As a result of the 1980 Housing Act householders are entitled to a percentage discount on the cost of their council house which is determined by the number of years they had been tenants. Nearly 30% of people in Leigh Park have bought their own homes [probably nearer 50% in 2016]. Not only is the physical appearance altering as people convert their houses but people have started to take more pride in the area, as they now have an added interest.

Despite the set-backs of the past, the people of Leigh Park have started in their own way to change Leigh Park to how they would have it.

So the residents of today are matching the lives of the first families by building a better life for themselves against considerable odds. The memoires of the first residents have helped us build up an image of what it was like in the beginning, with no public transport, shops, public houses, etc. and the continuous building.

What will the residents today be saying in 35 years-time? How will Leigh Park have changed over the next few years?

**The Stigma of Leigh Park**

by the Reverend John Lambert

There has been a good deal of writing in the past ten years about the Christian ministry. Men and women within the church, parson and layman, have been questioning it as a full time job.

Nearly ten years in Leigh Park convinced me that the call I received many years ago to the ministry was a right one. Since I have exercised that call in daily work, I have felt that the work of the Christian ministry can be and is satisfying and exciting.

Contact for me with Leigh Park goes back to the days when I was in the Army. Those who found themselves moved into the area considered themselves singularly unfortunate.

Many people do not realize that those who live in a Council estate have to face a stigma. It is the stigma of being thought of as a second-class society, of being people who are either not capable of anything better in life, or who want to live
off the rest of the community. For the great majority of inhabitants this is untrue, and the ideas in letters in the Press about people who live in Council houses are so wide of the mark that they are generally ridiculous.

Leigh Park was a terrible mistake from a planning point of view. The principal blame must rest squarely upon the authority responsible for its building. To build a community of the size that there is now at Leigh Park, making it one class was a tragedy. It resulted in a community that will always suffer because it was not integrated, where leadership will always be at a premium, and those who are leaders are worked to death.

Exciting

When God called me to minister to this community there was no Baptist Church as such, simply a group of people meeting in the front room of a farmhouse. Those early days were exciting. I practised on these people and on the steadily increasing circle of contacts that grew.

Undoubtedly I was very wet behind the ears, but ministering in a working class community soon taught me how to speak and how to explain the Christian faith, because the ordinary man is not slow to tell you exactly what he thinks about you.

One of the first things that we did was to agree to experiment.

We learned not to look at people as though they were pew fodder, but to love them for their sakes. We had to live down the peculiar ideas about the clergyman that are held by so many people. Plenty of people think that he works only one day a week and spends the rest with his roses and keeping bees. Nothing is further from the truth about the clergy at Leigh Park.

As well as the hilarious moments and the off-beat there were those occasions of sadness and courage: the woman [Eileen Beard] who served people so much that she did not care about her own health until cancer had gained too strong a hold upon her and she died. They named a house after her Bartons Road in Leigh Park. Working-class people are like that, and this was their way of enshrining her memory.

Stronger

I could go on about marriage guidance, searching for husbands who have run away from the family, and the strange places in which some of them have been found, or looking for and tracking down missing girls, sometimes youngsters from the best families where you cannot see how the, parents have gone wrong.
Indeed, you know that they have not gone wrong and all that you can do is try to relieve the aching of their breaking hearts. After times like this you go home and look at your own children and pray.

Because the churches showed that they cared, relationships between the professional bodies or the estate grew stronger and you found yourself working in conjunction with doctor, teacher, probation worker, social welfare worker and there grew a great trust and a bond of affection so deep that I will never forget.

It was inevitable that such a level of work should bring us own difficulties: for me in the form of a nervous breakdown. To have to enter hospital, even as a voluntary patient, was something that was frightening. To stand on the other side of the door where you formerly had ministered as a priest or a parson to people who were nervously and mentally sick was a salutary experience, but as one lived and moved among these people. God gave a deeper understanding not only of oneself but of this whole problem of suffering.

A Cause

I realize that I am best known on the estate for being embroiled in the rent disputes. I have never sought publicity as such, but I have not shunned it when it has been necessary to fight a cause I believe, with the other clergy that the principles we set out to fight for were right: that there needed to be a better understanding of the tenant; less bureaucratic treatment. Leigh Park as a community has suffered from bureaucracy very badly, particularly in the attitude of the Housing Department.

In the early days of the rent battle most people thought that we were fanatics. We were called nasty names, but as time went on people began to see that we were striving for something that was right.

We were trying to keep personalities out of it, to establish things that were good and fair people do not realize that if the original rent rises that were suggested had been passed in the first stages that it would have ruined Leigh Park.

The men and women we needed to retain for the sake of the community would have had to move out. That is why the clergy became involved and it is certainly the reason why I felt called to act as I did.

In that rents battle I found comradeship. I look back with affection upon men and women who I regard as deep friends, because that friendship was forged in a period of agony of the community.
Strange

Few people would realize that the first rent march was planned in a parson's study beneath a simple wooden cross. God gave me some strange jobs to do in Leigh Park, but that surely must have been one of the strangest.

If the Baptist Church at Leigh Park had suffered because of an outreaching minister it has loved me sufficiently to bear the suffering. In the long run I do not believe that the Kingdom of God will be the loser, for the goodwill towards those churches which practise faith in action is enormous, and I pray that my successor may reap where I have sown.

It is time in our conventional churches that men and women who believe in Jesus and sing some of the great missionary hymns with fervour and passion look towards the new areas at places in which they should be working, and begin to practise what they sing. Here in England is a missionary field, and in particular in the new housing areas.

Leigh Park – Garden City of the South

Introduction

It was in September 1947 that the first sod was turned to start the building process of Leigh Park housing estate. This booklet is not intended to be a definitive history of that first 50 years. It is merely a collection of recently recorded memories of some of the early residents with additional supporting material taken from a wide variety of sources, including some earlier recorded and quoted reminiscences.

People’s memories differ and so there may seem to be some contradiction or inaccuracies within this booklet. If so, let us hope that they will revive further memories and promote discussion and more reminiscing.

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The History

In 1086 The Doomsday Survey listed Havant as being owned by the Bishop of Winchester 'for his monks'. From a market town it developed into a thriving medieval community which later became known for parchment and glove making, cottage industries which were common in many towns.

After the opening of the railway to Brighton in 1847 and to direct line to London in 1859, Havant developed even further as a dormitory town. The largest house in the area was Leigh Park house situated in nearly 2,000 acres of land to the north of Havant.

Sir George Staunton purchased the lease of Leigh Park Estate in 1820 and then in 1827, he bought the freehold from the Bishop of Winchester. He spent his leisure time creating the magnificent gardens which remain virtually unchanged today.

Sir George became Member of Parliament for South Hampshire and later for Portsmouth, living in Leigh Park House until his death in 1859. His successor, William Stone MP, replaced the 18th century house with another in the Victorian Gothic style. He lived there until 1874 when the estate was again put up for sale.

In 1875 Leigh Park was sold to the FitzWygram family and it was they who first encouraged the use of the gardens for children’s outings and other events.

*I was born in Havant in 1919 and in the 1920s I used to visit the gardens on the Leigh Park Estate and view the flowers – my mother was passionate for flowers but we were never allowed to pick any. We would play in the fields and in the winter go skating on the ponds in the fields because my father knew all the farmers from his work as a blacksmith and we had their permission. We would walk there via New Lane which was just a grass road.*

The Leigh Park Estate was once more advertised for sale by auction in 1936 and a large part was purchased by Parkleigh Investments Ltd for £72,000. In 1940 the Admiralty requisitioned Leigh Park House for use by the mine design department (UCWE) who were responsible for the design of mines, depth charges and minesweeping. Their research section was sited at the nearby West Leigh House with a manufacturing facility in Martins Road.

Portsmouth City Council first considered Leigh Park as the site for what was later termed 'The Garden City of the South' in 1943. The development was to be a group of villages clustered around a central civic and shopping area. The
proposal was approved by the government in the same year. A year later they paid £122,465 for 1672 acres – £75 per acre, the majority being purchased from Parkleigh Investments Ltd.

In 1944 Havant and Waterloo Urban District Council expressed surprise at the larger than at first proposed plans for housing at Leigh Park and made a decision to oppose the development at every opportunity. However, the purchase of the land was finalised in 1945 through the co-operation of Alderman H D Gilbert, a Director of Parkleigh Investments Ltd.

Leigh Park House was vacated by the Admiralty and de-requisitioned on 1 September 1956. Various suggestions were made for the use of the house including Community Centre, ante-natal clinic and cottage hospital but Portsmouth City Council decided it had no public use for the building and they gave authority for it to be nationally advertised for lease or sale.

In 1957 Portsmouth Parks Committee announced their intention to retain Leigh Park House and grounds as an open space, but West Leigh House was demolished in the same year. Having fallen into a state of disrepair Leigh Park House was demolished in 1959.

The Post War Years and the Development

On returning to the Portsmouth area after the war we were housed by Havant and Waterlooville Urban District Council in Nissen huts in Leigh Park, then later moved to a cottage on the Petersfield Road.

My husband was informed that we had been allocated a Nissen hut over at Stockheath. He told them in no uncertain terms that he’d been a prisoner of war living in a Nissen hut with 10 others for four and half years. No way was he going to have his family living in a Nissen hut, so they allocated us this house.

One of the huts was eventually used for selling produce.

The large number of people made homeless by the bombing of Portsmouth, and the steady increasing number of returning servicemen, posed a serious housing problem for the area. One immediate solution was to use the naval camps in Leigh Park and the first residents were moved into these Nissen huts as temporary accommodation.

Some people used their own initiative and squatted in the camps, simply because they had nowhere else to go. Other families were allocated huts by the local
authorities. There were four or five bases:

Belmont Camp in Bedhampton where the naval church was converted to the present day St Nicholas. The St Albans area of West Leigh, near the site of Oak Park School. In the woods above Dunsbury Way. Fraser Camp was the last to remain standing. The beginnings of Stockheath School were the former administration offices and ward room for officers of HMS Daedalus III.

The Nissen huts were not only occupied by Hampshire people, but also Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian refugees forced to flee Europe during the war. Destitute groups used to arrive at Havant Station to be housed in Fraser and HMS Daedalus III camps.

The Nissen huts were made with corrugated iron and concrete and each had a bathroom and kitchen extension added at a cost of £450 before the family moved in. Many people cultivated the surrounding land and kept pigs and chickens. Each hut had its own cess pit.

Inside it was fairly spacious, with a large living room and two or three bedrooms. Heating was provided by a black iron stove which burned logs and coal. Hot water was from an electric immersion heater which was operated by a penny slot meter. In the West Leigh Camp the residents renovated the semi derelict officers’ mess and used it as a family social club. They opened a bar, played bingo and ran a Sunday school. The 'Red Spot', 'Blue Spot' and 'Textell' vans sold groceries, meat and fish each week. Eventually shops were opened on the camp premises.

There were gypsies on the end of the common who had the whitest tablecloths ever seen. They would set the tables with the finest cutlery beside the hawthorn hedge that ran the length of Purbrook Way. As well as the tablecloths, the rest of their immaculate washing was draped over the hedges to dry. Their horses were tethered but they were always breaking free, following the people down the lane at night clanking their chains like Jacob Marley’s ghost. They put the 'fear of God' into any suspecting person!

The first new post war development on Leigh Park was the erection of pre-fabs by Havant Council in Havant Way which was opposite Bedhampton Way. These were followed by Havant building Battens Way (it should have been Battins Way but the sign shop made a mistake which was never altered), Stockheath Way and the one side of Bedhampton Way. These were occupied at about the same time as
the first Portsmouth houses.

On 15 September 1947 the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth, Councillor Winnicott, started the machine which cut the first sod to open up the first trench at Leigh Park – 'this land of hope and promise'. The development was designated a 'satellite town' rather than a 'new town' but was later more commonly referred to as 'Portsmouth City Council's overspill housing estate at Leigh Park'.

In the early 1960s I sat on joint committees which were looking at establishing a 'Solent City' of Portsmouth and the surrounding area. South of Portsea Island was to be the tourist attractions, with the west of the Island to North End being all tourist hotels. The Dockyard was to be turned into commerce, and cease being a Naval Centre. It was planned for Leigh Park to be the main residential and industrial area, to include the City garden centres.

In 1972 a deputation went to London to lobby for Leigh Park to be officially designated a 'new town' as it comprised 10,000 family units with a possible population of 40,000. This was rejected but Portsmouth was informed that closer contacts with Havant Urban District Council should be formed voluntary, if not the Government would make a decision on the matter. Portsmouth agreed on allowing some Havant Councillors on to Portsmouth Housing Committee with no voting rights. This arrangement eventually ceased. It was also agreed that liaison should take place with leaders of political groups and certain council officials of both authorities meeting regularly. It very rarely met.

The Early Days – Moving in

1950 the Evening News reported that work was well underway to transform woods and open lands into a large housing estate.

I moved to Corhampton Crescent, Leigh Park in 1949 – my husband had been a prisoner of war.

I moved into this house in 1949. My husband was in the Royal Marines at Eastney Barracks and I was in Cornwall. We were allocated this house after turning down a Nissen hut.

We came up from Cornwall in a day to look at the house. We couldn't get in as there had been a break-in and the lock had been changed. The only people living here were right up the end. When we moved in my husband came up a day ahead of
me with the furniture in a hired van.

Other people started to move in gradually but there were big gaps and missing numbers where they said they were going to build blocks of flats. My husband had been in the Army and I had been on the housing list for 11 years!

They grazed horses across on the green and it was nothing to open up the door and find one of the horses on one of my lawns. They would frighten you to death but we used to shoo them and chase them off.

I moved from Southsea to Leigh Park in 1953 at the age of 21 and later worked for some of the builders on the estate.

I moved into Dunsbury Way from Copmor Portsmouth, in the early fifties when my son was 12. We were only the second family in that area, there was only one other lady there. We lived there for a fortnight on our own and never spoke to anyone.

I moved from lodgings in Portsmouth to Broadmere Avenue, Leigh Park, in 1954 after leaving the Navy. I served as a Stoker Mechanic on submarines. We caught the bus from Portsmouth to Havant then Havant to Petersfield Road, everywhere was bare except for some houses being built in the distance. Leigh Park was advertised as 'The Garden City of The South – A Place Fit for Heroes to Live'!

A number of people were being frantically moved out to Leigh Park without being told or understanding the problem of moving into an area where there were so little facilities. We were allocated a council house in Catherington Way, Leigh Park in March 1954. Further buildings along the road were still being finished, so we had no pavements! Mud everywhere!

Many of the new residents were amazed at the vastness and the openness of the estate and found it all new and clean after the claustrophobic feel to Portsmouth streets. Children felt free and excited, the wild flowers and dawn chorus made the city seem a million miles away. To these early residents it really was a village atmosphere, even if the lack of facilities and amenities came as a bit of a shock after city life.

A large number of the new residents, right up to 1955, were moved to Leigh Park from lodgings, often of only one or two rooms in Portsmouth, without any choice
– Leigh Park or nothing.

However they were all grateful to find themselves in modern, spacious houses with all the mod cons and facilities they had lacked in their previous accommodation. They were enchanted with the thought of living in a house with an upstairs, hot running water, two inside toilets, a real bathroom and no coal-fired cooking range to be black-leaded!

New residents were unaware of the magnitude of the estate and even in the late fifties there were still many cases of people getting on a bus in Portsmouth to visit their new homes for the first time without realising that asking for 'Leigh Park' was not enough. Bus conductors however were used to it and were always helpful in identifying the road.

Some of the first residents got off the bus at Bedhampton and then, carrying all manner of goods and chattels, walked the two miles down New Road from the railway gates, not to a house number and a road name, but to a block number and a road number. 'Block 109B, Road A4' was a house in what was later to be named Bramdean Drive.

The first residents to move into Rownhams Road in 1949 were surprised to find a stream running down the middle of the unmade road with just a plank to cross on. There were some very close calls with accidents in the stream involving young children.

By 1951 1,000 Portsmouth families had been moved to Leigh Park.

In 1960 extra rent concessions introduced as incentives to induce people to accept accommodation at Leigh Park - 12/6d off a 2 bedroom unit, 15/- off a three or four bedroom unit.

**The Homes**

*We had sparse things, we just had the bare essentials, but we were happy. It was like a palace to us. To have your own place. To shut your own door and not have anybody to answer to. It was absolutely heaven really. We were thrilled when we first saw the house.*

*This block of concrete houses was built by Laings but there were a lot of builders up here doing various houses. There were just about 8 houses along here to begin with. There was no other building, just rubble.*
They built the concrete houses first then the brick ones. To start with all over the estate there were small groups of concrete houses with gaps in between. Laings built first in Bramdean Drive or 'road A4'. Brick walls covered with concrete-looking pebble dash.

There were a goodly number of folks who had the gas and electric meters on a 'shilling only', and as there was few shops had to decide whether to have the 'light' on or the 'gas' to cook on.

Most of those, probably all, in this block have bought their houses and one or two across the road have bought them.

In the initial development plan Leigh Park was permitted to accommodate 1,500 houses only. It wasn't possible to exceed this number originally because of difficulties with foul sewage and surface water drainage.

The first stage of building would provide 800 homes, 450 traditional brick. The remainder, and the first to be built, would be constructed of pre-fabricated concrete slabs for speed of building. Residents often refer to these as 'Orlit' or 'Reema' houses and they remain a distinctive feature of the estate today.

In 1949 Max Lock, the area Planning Consultant, submitted a report that recommended the building of no more than the present 800 houses in Leigh Park which should be handed over to the local district council. He felt no further development beyond the population of 5,000 should be proceeded with. Other sites adjacent to existing communities to be used for infilling with overspill housing. He further recommended that the land remaining unused at Leigh Park be used to re-site and relocate the hospitals from Portsea Island.

The Lock report was ignored, Leigh Park was no longer to be considered a new town and the idea for handing over the scheme to Havant was conveniently ignored. Whatever Portsmouth had originally stated – New Town, Satellite Town or Garden City – the plan was to build an independent community. It was to have its own civic centre, shops, cinemas, leisure facilities and industry – self-sufficient but owned by Portsmouth. When it lost its right to independent status, Leigh Park became essentially an area for overspill housing.

The contract for building houses on Leigh Park was given to a number of different builders including Auriol Builders Ltd, H E Collins, Cortis and Hankins Ltd, Faulkners, Howe and Bishop, J C Nicholls Ltd., A Smith and Son (Bognor Regis), Geo. Wimpey and Company, Gilbert Ash, Henry Jones and Leigh
Construction, all of whom started building houses at the same time but in different parts of the estate. This would explain why there is much dispute over the first road to be occupied – the first houses were probably finished and occupied in a number of roads at about the same time.

The extent of development on the Leigh Park estate is shown within the thick black border. Each plot shows the date it was developed or planned for development for housing. The central shopping centre was scheduled for the next year (1952) and the undated areas were considered suitable for schools and open spaces of various kinds.

A Mr E Ware who worked for Faulkners Builders, Waterlooville apparently 'laid the first brick' and put an old penny under it. He was general foreman his two sons and three brothers also worked for Faulkners. Mr Ware was born in 1907 and passed away in 1963.

In 1951 it was reported in council that difficulties with sewage and drainage limiting the number of houses were being resolved. Application was to be made
for outline permission for the erection of 9,000 houses and the 'Leigh Park 10 Year Plan' was announced. This provided for the development of Leigh Park and the immediate area to provide 9,500 homes and give accommodation for about 37,000 persons spread over a period of 10 years. In 1954 City Council gave approval for the building of an estate office house and depot for 'the management of Corporation Estate' on the sewage disposal works in Dunsbury Way.

By 1955 3,491 housing units had been completed; the total number of flats was 443 and there were eight contractors on site incorporating various construction principles from traditional brick to pre-cast concrete sections. By the late 1950s Leigh Park was expanding in all directions, by the estate’s 10th anniversary there were 4,500 homes.

The Warren Estate was built on Havant Thicket, Sharps Copse was beginning to take shape and Leigh Park House had been demolished. There were no longer gaps between Leigh Park and Havant, and Leigh Park and Bedhampton. Eileen Beard House, a block of flats in Bartons Road, is named after the mother of one of the early teachers at Riders Lane Junior School, Miss Janet Beard.

In 1960 Arthur Dallimore was the warden of 443 flats with a total population of 750 including 235 old age pensioners. Amongst the flat residents were Germans, French, Belgians, Dutch, Maltese, one Russian and an Indonesian woman. His day’s work started with a two hour patrol round the blocks of flats of which he was warden. He made another two hour tour at night.

The People

The plan was to eventually house 23,000 people but by August 1951 the population had reached 3,400, including at least 600 to 700 children. It was reported in 1951 that the development is to provide 9,500 homes over a period of 10 years for about 37,000 people.

In 1955 the estimate of the ultimate population was 30,000, to be reached by 1960 when the estate was due to be completed. By the estate’s 10th anniversary there were 15,000 residents – halfway to the estimated 30,000 for 1960.

In 1964 the population reached 27,000 and was expected to grow to 36,000 by 1974. By the early 1970s Leigh Park had become one of the largest council estates in Europe, with a population of 39,000.
The Jobs

I worked in Portsmouth Dockyard and travelled there and back every day by bicycle. Later I worked for builders in Leigh Park and saw a lot of the first building going up.

In the master plan for the estate, employment was envisaged for 4,400 people on a site of 55 acres, with 'a good range of employment for both sexes and all ages'.

The Max Lock Report of 1949 was not so enthusiastic about Leigh Park's industrial future. It was pointed out that the people already housed in Leigh Park would have to rely on jobs provided in Portsmouth. A tradition of travelling to work in Portsmouth was established, proving difficult to modify in the following years.

Lack of local industry was addressed by the building of a 40 acre trading estate. The factories 'offer tremendous scope for female labour, and thousands avail themselves of the opportunity to supplement the family income'.

The dockyard at Portsmouth remained the dominant employer of those in Leigh Park for many years. In the late forties it was estimated that 60% of Leigh Park men worked in the dockyard. It provided more apprenticeships to the labour force than did local industry and although it was quite a distance to travel each day, large numbers of people preferred to work there. Some even cycled to work at Lee-on-the-Solent.

In the early days of the estate some housewives found an extra source of income scrubbing out new houses after the builder's had finished. It was hard work but the £1 per house which they were paid was most welcome. In 1956 there was concern that not enough male employment was being introduced into the area.

The Rent

The weekly rent was 1 pound 12 shillings to start with. They used to come and collect it; then there was a rent office in Dunsbury Way where Focus 230 is now.

The money Portsmouth used to buy Leigh Park came from rates money which had to be subsequently repaid from rent income. To do this Portsmouth City Council raised the rent on all properties 'outside the city' in 1963 to an all-time high. This resulted in protests and demonstrations by way of 'rent marches'.
I had four pounds a week when I came here and out of that one pound five shillings I paid for rent.

In the early days we had rent collectors who came round for the rent, a gentleman then a lady I’ll always remember this day. As young people we always had regular routines – Monday was washdays, Tuesday was something else, we don't do these things today I’m afraid, you just do it when you feel like it. This day it was bedroom day and it was rent day and I'd just paid the rent. I went upstairs to shake the duster out of the window at the front and as the rent lady left me to go across the road a van came up, got hold of her and bundled her into the back of the van. I couldn't do a thing about it because I was upstairs, I couldn't scream or do anything.

There was a lad just coming up the road. I ran down and he said that he'd taken the car number, and I said I was too far away to do anything. Chance was, it was the chap at the back here, they caught him. It must have been in the late fifties or early sixties. Roughly about 1960. It was from then on they decided they wouldn't have rent collectors any more, too dangerous. Then they opened up the rent collecting place up at Park Parade.'

In 1952/1953 the rent for a house was 1 pound 12 shillings and 1 penny per week, inclusive of half yearly general rate of 10 pounds 18 shillings and water rate of 15 shillings.

In 1960 extra rent concessions were introduced as incentives to induce people to accept accommodation at Leigh Park – 12 shillings and 6 pence off a two bedroom unit, 15 shillings off a three or four bedroom unit.

The Shops

There were mobile shops here and they were so good to us they really looked after you. As soon as you moved in, the day you came the milk was waiting for you by the Co-op. The Co-op did a lot then others came, so you had two butchers and others and you then had a choice.

Pinks had a good butcher and they were always very good to us young people who didn't have much money. There were some lovely people here.

I think there were shops in Botley Drive at this time but most of the shopping was done from mobile shops – greengrocer, baker, Co-op and a grocer. For the main shopping we used to walk into Havant and place an order at the Co-op; this was then delivered by van from the Waterlooville branch.'

If I went out with the children I just went for a walk or into Havant shopping until
they built the shops at Botley Drive, the first ones round here. There was a grocer and veg shop, newsagent, no Post Office or anything like that.

When we moved into Catherington Way in 1954 the nearest shops were in Stone Square with the bigger ones in Havant. In 1955 we used to buy fresh produce direct from the farm at the top of Exbury Road.

In 1955 I went to work in Havant for F. Worley, a shoe shop, and the local shops there were Timothy Whites, Woolworths and Home and Colonial, none of which are there now.

When the Park Parade shops were first built they consisted of a newsagents, Post Office and Barnard Brothers furniture store. 'When the Co-op store opened in Park Parade you could go in and give your order and they delivered it, so I had my groceries delivered.'

The residents of the Nissen hut camps were the first to be served by mobile shops. The 'Red Spot', 'Blue Spot' and 'Textell' vans sold groceries, meat and fish each week. These mobiles increased and expanded their business once building started.

The first shops on Leigh Park were those opened on the camp premises by Mr English and Mr Cusworth at West Leigh Camp and by Mr and Mrs Piper and Mr and Mrs Burnett at the Fraser Camp. Rationing was still in force necessitating the new residents having to transfer to a new rationing authority, in this case Petersfield. This caused some confusion.

Any day of the week dozens of mobile shop vans could be seen on the estate, each identifiable by a loud musical klaxon horn. As well as mobile shops in vans some traders arrived with their own cars. A local milkman, a little chap called Joe from Drayton would do shopping for some of his customers.

There was a cottage at the bottom of Rownhams Road where lived an old lady and her son who drove around in a horse and cart selling fresh vegetables. The nearest main shopping centre was at Havant and, if one went on one of the hourly buses, the fare would cost 2 and a half pennies.

In 1954 approval was given for the erection of 6 shops in Barncroft Way. Builder G. Wimpey and Co. In 1955 Mrs Connie Sparshott opened a hairdressers, one of the first businesses to occupy premises in Park Parade shops.

In 1955 a newsagency leased premises at Stone Square.
In 1956 Leigh Park shops consisted of:

Park Parade – two departmental stores, newsagent & confectioner, two bakers, four grocers, three butchers, wine and spirit merchant, fruiterer & greengrocer, greengrocer, two chemists, footwear, gents outfitters, hardware, cycles & prams & toys, shoe repairs, house furnishers, radio and TV rental, hairdressers.

Botley Drive – Grocer, newsagent/post office, fruiterer/ greengrocer, butcher, ironmonger.

Barncroft Way – From Hazelholt Drive were: fish shop, butcher, greengrocer, paper shop, hairdresser and grocers.

Stone Square – Grocer, chemist, newsagent, butcher/ fruiterer.

In 1957 Mrs Isabel Dryer started running a confectionery shop.

In 1959 application was made to the City Council by private developer for permanent market of 13 small shopping units facing Park Parade.

In 1961 the City Council received an offer to extend shopping facilities of Leigh Park shopping centre.

The same year residents in Middle Park Way/Botley Drive areas petitioned for chemist facilities to be provided. Terms were agreed to open a chemists on the corner of Purbrook Way and Middle Park Way.

In 1964 work started on Greywell shopping precinct.

The Roads and the Environment

Going down the road outside was a hedge, a bramble hedge, and it used to be full of rats. We had rats going up the drainpipes!

When we moved in the road was done but there was no pavement. There were just ditches where the kerb stones were to be put and they often filled up with water. There was no fencing up. No street lights.

The Park Parade roundabout was built to replace the crossroads in 1973/1974 after myself and another councillor witnessed a fatal accident, one of many accidents which led to a campaign within the council to build the roundabout.

It was a stipulation here that they had to keep most or a good many of the trees.

There was no refuse collection in the early days, we were here nearly two years
before we had a proper refuse collection. We used to bury the rubbish at the top of the garden in holes which my husband dug.

The roads were surfaced but the first tenants were faced with no lighting, no footpaths and lots of mud. Wellington boots were the order of the day as most people wore their wellies in Leigh Park and took their decent shoes in a bag on the bus.

One family had a 'footwear procedure' when travelling into Portsmouth. They wore their wellies until past The Cricketers in Riders Lane because of the mud. They would take them off and put them in a bag in the babies pram as they had to walk to the station at Bedhampton or Havant to get to Portsmouth. On the way home they would reverse the procedure.

The original estate boundary lines were:

North:  Bramdean Drive, Kingsclere Avenue, Nutley Road, Botley Drive  
West:  Hermitage Stream, Botley Drive (part) (renamed Purbrook Way)  
South:  Corhampton Crescent, Botley Drive (part as above)  
East:  Dunsbury Way

In 1949 it was agreed to change the name of Idsworth Avenue to Iping Avenue.

In 1955 it was reported that few of the people living on the estate knew many of the 100-odd new roads, and it is very difficult for tradespeople to find their way around – even the postmen had barely time to become used to the layout before another street was added. It wasn't unusual for new residents to make their own homemade maps of the district for guidance in finding their way around and helping others.

The majority of the roads are named after Hampshire villages but some of the historical names connected with Leigh Park have been retained:

Bondfields – from the original 'Bondfields Gate' in the south-west corner of Havant Thicket, where the road entered the Forest of Bere.

Barncroft – from the name of an 8 acre arable field situated alongside the Hermitage Stream, which runs right through the Ward (so named).

Hermitage Stream – a 15th century Hermitage Chapel dedicated to Saints Christopher and James stood at a site near Bedhampton level crossing in West Street.
Battins – derives its name from 'Battins Copse' within Havant Thicket and part of the Forest of Bere.

Billy Lawn Avenue - thought by some to be from 'Billye' - a water meadow plant, lawn' – an open place in a wooded area.

Riders Lane – this name is of great antiquity, and in the 15th century was recorded as 'Riderslond', and later as 'Ryders Lane'.

The roads built on the old Oak Park site are named after heads and teachers from the school – Gaulter Close, Hodges Close, Barrows Close. The other road there Anderson Close, is named after the first District Nurse in Havant.

In 1962 it was announced that for safety reasons some parts of the Hermitage Stream were to be 'culverted'. In 1992 Havant Borough Council launched the Hermitage Stream Initiative.

The Transport

No-one could afford cars in those days. We had just one car here and that was because my husband used to work on the buses and so had a car. He was serving at Royal Marine Barracks Eastney and used to bike it there and back every day.

You know in them days, it's fascinating to remember it, I took my oldest boy once down to the bus where they all met to go on the bus, it was a proper school bus, one penny I think they used to charge them to go into Havant.

My boy didn't want me to go anymore! That's how grown up they were, you can't do that today. They were safe. He said 'Mum, I don't want you, I've only got to walk down the bottom'. All his friends were there; you never worried about them at all.

I travelled to work by bus or train but later had a 350cc BSA motorcycle. This had been shipped out to Singapore but due to the Japanese invasion had not been sold and remained in its packing crate until after the war when it was shipped back here to be sold, still unpacked and unused after seven years.

The buses from Portsmouth came as far as where the Community Centre now stands and they turned there.

The buses at first terminated at the top of Dunsbury Way and later went as far as Kilmeston Close.

In 1954 a bus depot was built on the site of the sewage works in Dunsbury Way
The first residents found that there were no buses serving the immediate area and some walked into Bedhampton or Havant to get the bus or train to Portsmouth. Many set off for work in Portsmouth and even Lee-on-the-Solent at about 5.30 a.m. By the time they returned in the evening they had been twelve hours away from home – more if overtime was being worked. This silent, dourly-pedalling army was abroad even in the worst weather. For the most part they just couldn't afford the bus fares.

A common cry in the early days was: The beer is sixpence dearer out here. That is not to be taken literally; the sixpence was represented in the bus fares a man may have had to pay to travel from home to the nearest 'local' and back!

The scarcity of buses meant a long day for school children as well. Some would have a long walk to catch a bus at 6.40 a.m. to go to the school. The next bus wasn't until 10.30 a.m. Some came out of school at 4.30 p.m. but had to sit and wait until 7 p.m. for the return bus home. It was no wonder that the bicycle was a popular form of transport.

Pay day at Park Parade was quite a sight! Bicycles parked three deep against walls for scores of yards, an impossible task for the owners to sort them out when they left. There were tandems with sidecars, too. The sidecars were useful for carrying the shopping, especially if the parcels were bulky.

In 1955 residents caught the 148A and 148B buses to Portsmouth, the fare was one shilling and four pence (approximately 7p in today’s money!). The return journey could be a problem as the 148B late at night stopped at Barncroft Bridge resulting in a long walk in the dark for many.

Corporation buses were every 15 minutes to Portsmouth and they were always very full. Southdown operated the route into Havant about every 20 minutes depending upon which part of the estate it went through. Some conductors would shout out: Any more for jungle town. In 1956 planning permission given for City of Portsmouth Transport to erect a caretaker’s hut and men’s convenience on land to be used for out-parking of buses in Fullflood Road off Dunsbury Way.

The Community Centre

The first social centre on the estate was the corrugated iron hut alongside the Cricketers pub. It was here that the Leigh Park Community Association started.
Scouts and Guides met in the hut and there was a gardening club and several other groups. On a Sunday it became a church, with the service often punctuated by the shouting and cheering of cricket players outside.

Stockheath Naval camp in Great Copse was mostly in ruins but the old guard room was still intact so early residents set to work cleaning, plastering and painting. It was soon the venue for a youth club and 'Ladies Night'. In the same area there was an International Youth Hostel where boys from Germany would visit, also a swimming pool.

In 1952 Leigh Park Community Association was given permission to lease certain buildings at Stockheath Camp for use as a Community Centre. In 1956 a scheme for an estimated £13,000 community centre at Leigh Park was unopposed by the Urban District Council, but was not approved by the Ministry.

In 1957 the City Council reserved a site for a community centre at the junction of Somborne Drive and Billy Lawn Avenue. Leigh Park's first community centre was situated in Fleetend Close, a U-shaped assembly of brick-built naval hutments which fell empty after the war. A building which in the early 1960s sustained a major part of Leigh Park's life. In 1960 it had 209 members, most were aged 35 and upwards.

In 1960 Training Ship Loyalty of the Nautical Training Corps met in the community centre every Friday. This involved a 'mass invasion' of about 150 boys and around 80 girls. Every evening the ex-naval hutments which constituted the community centre were the focus of numerous activities. There were classes for dressmaking, boat building, rug making, and other productive hobbies. There was a library and there were lectures. But the biggest 'gate' of the week in 1960 was for the tombola (bingo) session.

In 1960 the activities available in the community centre were publicised by the distribution of 7,000 pamphlets, one to each house on Leigh Park. There was little interest in toy-making, car maintenance or Saturday film shows. But no fewer than 130 boys and girls under the age of 15 wanted to learn ballroom dancing! As this subject was considered a 'further education' matter a private dancing instructor had to be found.

In May 1963 the new community centre, built at a cost of more than £100,000, was opened by the Chairman of Hampshire County Council, Mr. Alan Lubbock.
The Schools

The first school to be built on the estate was Riders. There was one over at Stockheath but my son was allocated to go into Havant. He used to go in by bus.

Trosnant School in Chilcombe Close was built in 1956. The Head was Mr. John Hunt who was keen to involve the parents, so the Parent Teacher Association was founded. They first built a stage in the big hall, then a swimming pool. The first Summer Fête they held, Lonnie Donnegan and his group provided the entertainment; I could hear the music from my house.

In August 1951 the county council announced plans to build a primary school. Until this was built children attend the Church of England school at Bedhampton, the primary school or secondary modern at Havant.

In 1955, before Front Lawn Schools were built and whilst Riders Junior was full, some children new to the estate had to travel by bus to Stockheath Juniors in Bedhampton. The school had been a naval camp during the Second World War, the buildings having been of single-storey, white-washed brick with only coke stoves to heat them, even in the coldest winter. The children had to don outdoor clothes in the rain or snow to change classrooms or go to the toilet. On 2 September 1955 Barncroft Junior School opened. In 1955 it was reported that fourteen schools were proposed, with five already built;

Barncroft County Infants and Junior, Barncroft Way. Riders County Infants (Head, Miss Woledge) and Junior (Head, Mr Parslow), Kingsclere Avenue. Stockheath County Primary, Hooks Lane. However, many children were still not attending school as there was no room for them.

Other schools which were opened: January 1957, Oak Park Secondary school, (Headmaster, Mr L V Gaulter Headmistress, Mrs F L Hodge). May 1957, Front Lawn Infants School, (Headmistress, Miss B Robinson-Woledge). Riders Infants School, (Headmistress Miss B Robinson-Woledge, sister of Front Lawn Infants Head). January 1958, Front Lawn Junior School, (Headmaster Mr R H S Lawrence). October 1958, Westleigh C of E School, (Headmistress, Miss J R Bright). The secondary school built was Broomfield County in Middle Park Way, now Park Community School. The building was shared for about three years by Broomfield Secondary, Havant Grammar and Park House Infants and Juniors. It wasn’t as overcrowded as it may sound as each school only had one or two years of pupils. Broomfield’s Head was Miss Gregory.
The Police

The Police Station was on the corner of Bishopstoke Road. There were about four or five houses in a row, the corner one was the police station and the others were police houses. The first policeman on Leigh Park was PC Locke who lived in a house in Botley Drive (later Purbrook Way) by the dentists’ surgery, before they built the police station and houses in Dunsbury Way. He was later joined by PC Fred Hodson. In 1956 the Police Office was situated at 80 Barncroft Way.

The Medical Services

There was no doctors’ surgery near where we lived, Doctor Concannon held his surgery in a house in Ellisfield Road. We had been there a year before I could get a doctor; I went to the one in Riders Lane but he wouldn't take us because he had enough people.

One day I was out walking down the road with my dog when I saw a man putting a plaque up on his wall, so being nosey, I went over and had a little look, and it was Doctor Dilnot. That night we registered with Doctor Dilnot. His surgery was held in part of an ordinary house.

Doctor Glanville from Havant came and used to go into one of the houses, in Purbrook Way I think. That was our doctor then. He was the first doctor I remember. To start with there was one district nurse, who was not on the phone. The nearest doctors were in Havant.

Mrs Anne Barnes claims to have been the first baby born on Leigh Park. Her parents lived at 113c, later to be renumbered 77 Bramdean Drive. Sister George was one of the first, if not the first, midwife for Leigh Park and a German lady, Use Gunszt was also another of the first midwives.

The first District Nurse in Havant, Elizabeth Anderson, is commemorated in the name Anderson Close on the old Oak park School site.

The Dental Practice serving the estate in 1956 was Downton and Dunnett, 193 Purbrook Way. The Doctors were: Concannon, Fawn Hope Stockheath Road, and Fawkner-Corbett and Glanville, Merrimede, Riders Lane.

The District Midwife was Nurse Johnson, 8 Barncroft Way. Before the Health Centre opened the baby clinic was held in St Francis Hall.
May 1963 saw the official opening of the Health Centre and Ambulance Station by the Chairman of Hampshire County Council, Mr. Alan Lubbock.

**The Postal Facilities**

*We had to go to Havant for a Post Office. What we did was, we used a path across where Havant College is, that was a short cut. It wasn't too bad a walk. We couldn't afford to use the bus a lot, even at two and a half pennies a time.*

*The first Post Office I remember on the estate was in a house in Botley Drive, on a corner, but I didn't use it. I kept going into Havant until the Post Office round here was opened.*

*Soon after moving in we came across an elderly lady in a distressed condition not having eaten for some time. She had moved up from Portsmouth but had not changed the address on her pension book. At the Post Office in Botley Drive they told her to fill in a form but would not give her any money.*

Initialy there was no Post Office, just pillar boxes and phone kiosks. No stamp machines, no way of registering letters, nowhere to collect allowances or pensions, except at Havant or Bedhampton gates.

The Post Offices in private houses that some early residents remember would have provided a limited service, stamps, post etc. – nothing such as allowances and pensions which would have meant large sums of money on the premises.

**The Library**

In October 1957 Leigh Park library opened in Stockheath Lane. Chief Librarian, Mr F W S Bagulay. Assistants, Mr V Hewitt, Miss Walters, Miss Marsham, Mr Geoffrey Salter.

**The Churches**

*The Methodist Church in Botley Drive was one of the first churches. St Francis was the first church I remember on the estate. The Church hall was dedicated on September 12th 1954. Revd Guernsey came as vicar. Before that the vicar from Havant Revd Baker, Revd Grubb from Bedhampton and the Bishop of Portsmouth and some lay people like teachers and one or two others met in my room in the first few weeks that we arrived in Leigh Park to get started to know what to do about getting people interested in the church and different denominations of course.*
The Church of England started it all off but all denominations could go to the services just for the time. We used to meet up at the Cricketers hut for services, that was a hut running alongside the Cricketers pub. And they had a hut up the woods and we used to go all the way up there for a service. It was a Nissen hut about 300 yards up.

When we moved here in 1954 we had no churches so Methodists met in one anothers’ houses lead by the Revd Bailey from Drayton. Eventually Botley Drive church was built.

The first priest on the estate used a room in his house for Communion. Other services and Sunday School classes were held in a Nissen hut, half a mile from the nearest house.

In 1953 a site in Stockheath Road was bought for a Baptist Church, a site in Riders Lane for a Church of England church, and a site in Botley Drive for a Methodist Church. In 1955 the Roman Catholic church was completed. In 1956 work began on new Baptist and Methodist churches. In 1961 a site was purchased in Barncroft Way for erection of a Salvation Army Hall.

In 1955 as well as the St Francis Church Sunday School there was a Sunday school held in a little wooden mission church in the woods in Dunsbury Way, where Great Copse Drive is now. It was run by the minster Jim Kerr and his wife Eileen. The little church is now the Bethel Church next to the Working men’s Club further down Dunsbury Way.

**The Young People**

They let us hire the Cricketers hut for Sunday school which first then the services for the church started afterwards. For the youngsters there was a church Youth Club called the One Hundred and One Club.

An early youth club was held in the renovated guard room of the camp in Great Copse where the Swallow pub now stands. In the same area there was an International Youth hostel where boys from Germany would visit, also a reservoir used as a swimming pool.

One of the first policemen on the estate, PC Fred Hodson got so fed up with nicking the kids on the building sites that he became a scout and took over a Troop, which at least kept some of the children occupied.
In 1952 Leigh Park Wolf Cubs were given permission to rent a Nissen Hut at Stockheath Camp. In 1955 1st Leigh Park Scout Troop occupied a Nissen Hut in Ditcham Crescent. Application made for a site to erect two Nissen Huts from the old Stockheath Camp at Ditcham Crescent. The Scoutmaster was F S Hodgson, Overton Close, Leigh Park.

In 1963 the Portsmouth Diocesan Board rejected plans for a Church Hall and Curate’s House at the junction of Middle Park Way and Purbrook in favour of a Youth Centre. The Point Seven youth club was built in 1970, its name coming from the point 7 of an acre on which it was built. The manager was Mr. Derek Maguire and the first 'visitor' – Stephen Austin (14), of Rhinefield Close Havant.

The club closed after problems with fighting and unruly groups and became quite shabby. However it saw a revival when it was reopened by Revd Colin George, a curate of St Francis, who used it as his base for detached youth work. He would have live groups or a disco one night a week but it didn't last too long and soon the doors were closed again.

The County Youth Service later provided youth workers to the youth club and its name was changed to 'The Point'. Some-time later it was completely refurbished and re-opened as part of ‘Three Ways' along with Brent House Flats (young people's short term accommodation) and Off The Record (youth counselling service). Part of the money for the refurbishment was donated by Comic Relief and the comedian Lenny Henry performed the opening ceremony.

In 1993 the centre was taken over completely by the County Youth Service and became The Original Place Youth Arts Centre.

The Leisure Facilities and Activities

My sons, I never stopped them from doing anything. They went out here, I knew what they were doing, they either went up to the park at Havant or they were going up to the woods. Mostly up the woods they used to play. They could tell you so much that went on up there. They had these burners for burning stuff up there for charcoal.

We used to go for walks and picnics up there. Where the Warren is now we used to call it the Warren, we used to go down to that wood. There were some beautiful walks up there. I remember the old estate and the gardens. Before they took it all down we used to walk around there.
We held social functions in the green corrugated iron hut alongside the Cricketers and we started a young wives group. Hugh Guernsey got Mrs Wilson from the Rowlands Castle Mothers Union who came along to start a young wives group in 1951/52.

I took over the Young Wives Group and started the St Francis variety group. We used to entertain the young wives. We held dances and tramps balls, and a young wives group pancake race. We even did a three act play once – 'Night Must Fall' by Emlyn Williams – that was hard work. We used to go out to all the homes. We used to go everywhere – Chichester, Liphook, Portsmouth all around to all the homes and afternoon groups.

It was the City Council’s plan to relocate all the City’s gardens centres to Leigh Park which started the 'Sixpenny Six' on their protest. Portsmouth wanted to discourage people walking and enjoying Leigh Park Gardens, because of the commercial potential, and also greatly overstressed the vandalism point to encourage the City Council to place another 'sixpence' on the entrance fee for the gardens. Residents of Leigh Park were already being charged 'sixpence' (2½p) to enter the gardens so this extra would have made a 'shilling' (5p), whilst all gardens within Portsmouth were free.

Councillor Bill Taylor recalled:

Myself and four others, wrongly dubbed 'The Sixpenny Six' by the press, sat down in front of the gates one Saturday. We encouraged the members of the public not to pay the entrance fee but to give their names and addresses and make the council come to their homes to try and get it. We were eventually forcibly moved on by the police and the following Saturday during a similar protest we were arrested and later charged at Petersfield under some obscure Act of 1361 which was originally passed to protect the 'Local Gentry' from harassment, by the poor and starving peasants.

We were remanded to prison and sent to Winchester. I believe this was an unlawful act, but it seemed a bit of fun. Saturday morning we were taken from prison, in handcuffs, to the great hall in Winchester where three appeal judges sat in all their regalia. I believe this was the first time that an appeal court had sat on a Saturday, and we were released.

I remember the press coverage quite clearly as we made the front page of some of the national papers along with the headline 'ARMSTRONG WALKS ON THE MOON'!
The Labour Government later amended the Act.

The ‘Sixpenny Six’: Harry Loizides, Cllrs George and Betty Bell (JP), Bill Taylor, Barry Gardner, Les Humphreys.

Leigh Park’s peaceful Sir George Staunton country park grabbed the national headlines on 23 July 1969, the same weekend that man first walked on the moon. Six local residents, including a magistrate and councillors, were jailed after refusing to pay an entrance charge imposed by the owners, Portsmouth City Council.

The group became known as the Sixpenny Six martyrs and their battle led to greater access to the 150-acre park, then known as Leigh Park Gardens, for everyone. During the summer months, the gardens had been open to the public on just two afternoons a week.

It was the decision to increase entry charges from six old pennies (2.5p) to a shilling (5p) which sparked mass walk-ins by protesters, led by two Havant councillors, George Bell and his wife, Betty. With Bill Taylor, Barry Gardner, Harry Loizides and Les Humphreys, they were jailed under a 14th century act, after refusing to be bound over to keep the peace. The six were all remanded to prison, but three days later were freed and police eventually dropped all complaints against them. On August 1, Portsmouth’s parks and entertainments committee agreed to open the gardens to the public every day, from 10 a.m. until sunset, until the end of September that year.
In the same month, the then home secretary, James Callaghan, ordered a review of the 1361 act under which the Sixpenny Six were jailed. Three months later, Portsmouth agreed to abolish the entrance fee altogether, on condition the then Havant urban district council agreed to share the upkeep costs of the gardens. Members insisted their decision was nothing to do with the actions of the Sixpenny Six.

National Press Report

In the late 1960s there was a hut on the other side of Petersfield Road. On a Saturday morning we used to walk there for children’s Saturday morning theatre. I was just four years old. If you took along two tops from Typhoo tea packets you got in for free.

Many of the new residents had lived all their lives in a town and had never before had a garden, but now for some of them it became one of their main interests, although some of the early gardens were described as 'clay quagmires. Children who were never allowed out to play when they lived in Portsmouth were overjoyed to find natural playgrounds in the form of fields and open spaces so near at hand.

Leigh Park Gardens, with its fenced off house, and Havant Thicket, which included the Warren, also became the playgrounds for local children. In the woods there were a pair of derelict cottages which were probably quite dangerous to play in, but to the children it was just another adventure, as building continued around them so the joys of playing on a building site were soon discovered.

The Southern Agricultural Show was held where Park Parade, Front Lawn and Billylawn are now.

In the early days many men were lost to the social life of the community. When you had cycled from Leigh Park to Portsmouth and back, having done a day’s work in between, you didn’t feel at your best. Many fathers would have liked to have assisted with activities such as youth clubs – but they were whacked!

St Francis Church used to organise an annual pancake race. The course was one hundred yards starting at the junction of Iping Avenue along Highclere Avenue down to Riders Lane. There were three 'tossing points' at 25 yard intervals. There were no rules regarding type or size of pan or pancake but the seasoned campaigners knew that the best combination was a large pan and a small, thick, heavy, stodgy pancake!

Leigh Park Football Club was formed in 1958 and went on to win the Football Association Sunday Cup in 1969. That same year the Havant and Leigh Park
Football Club was formed in the Portsmouth League and in 1971 was put into the Hampshire League. In 1976 Leigh Park was dropped from the club’s name. The new Havant Town Football Club played its first game at West Leigh Park in 1982.

There was a bowling alley in Somborne Drive which was very popular. There was an afternoon housewives league at a cost of two and sixpence (12½p) per session. Young mothers could take their children, have a game and a cup of tea and spend an enjoyable light-hearted friendly time.

The bowling alley burnt to the ground one night and in August 1963 was replaced by the £250,000 Tenpin Centre, The Excel Bowl, managed by Mr Tom Summerfield. This in turn was eventually changed into a bingo and nightclub facility.

First Miss Leigh Park was Carol Outen of Dunsbury Way in 1964.

Nissen Hut They Called Home

Bob Hind

In the early years of the Second World War, a camp for the bombed-out people of Portsmouth was built at Bedhampton. It was located where you will now find James Road and Fraser Road, plus a large crescent where Woodgreen Avenue and Timsbury Crescent now run. For some reason the camp was not used for its original purpose and it remained disused throughout the war until it became a home for displaced persons (DPs) after the war. Inge Philpot with three of her children standing in what I believe to be Hooks Farm Way, Bedhampton today. To the north of Bedhampton Camp was another encampment of Nissen huts.

This was HMS Daedalus III, a satellite from HMS Daedalus at Lee-on-the-Solent. After the war it was also used by Displaced Persons until about 1949 when servicemen arriving home in their thousands and with nowhere to live were placed in the camp. They raised their new families there in the early baby boom years of the 1950s. When houses on the Leigh Park estate were built, these people were moved into them and the camp, where Hazelholt Drive and Redbridge Road are now, was demolished and replaced with housing. A couple who lived on the camp for several years were former soldier Ron Philpott and his wife Inge. Their daughter Sylvia spoke to me about living in this type of accommodation as a child.
The huts they inhabited became a street called Leyton Close, at the top end of Hazelholt Drive and Redbridge Road, leading out on to Park Lane. It would have been the HMS *Daedalus* III site. There was an elderly woman who lived in a bungalow just around the corner in Park Lane, who used to sell sweets. The Philpotts had to walk around to the back door, the top half always open, and ring the bell. It was the nearest place to buy sweets, so when their dad took them there they knew they were in for some treat or other. It was February 1954 and Sylvia remembers it well. She recalls:

*There was an old type of heater with a chimney in the centre of the room we used as a living room. There were two bedrooms and a bit of a garden at the back where my father grew vegetables. There were no local shops and everyone had to walk some distance to Havant. There was a man who used to visit with a horse and cart selling fruit and veg and a baker with a small van.*

The three older children went to Stockheath School and Sylvia can remember her classroom was curtained off down the centre to make two separate classrooms. She was then moved up a year and went into a different classroom, which was partly below ground level. She had to go down concrete steps to get in.

The school dining room had long wooden benches called forms on which they sat for meals. During school time the gates were always kept locked and when it was time to go home all the children had to form a line by the gates and wait for their mothers before the gates were opened and they were allowed to go home. Havant hospital was the nearest and the local doctor would often carry out minor surgery in patients’ homes. The youngest of the family was Michael, who was born prematurely in the Nissen hut. Sylvia adds:

*We all lived quite happily until the family was allocated a council house on the new Leigh Park estate. The house was in Overton Crescent. After being moved out of the Nissen huts we continued with Stockheath School until Riders School in Kingsclere Avenue was opened.*

2016

Ralph Cousins

In 1984 they asked: *What will the residents today be saying in 35 years-time? How will Leigh Park have changed over the next few years?*

Well we are now 32 years on so what has changed?
There are now only a few of those early residents still with us but many of their children are and remember those early difficult times and have happy memories. With the right to buy it is now estimated that about 50% of the houses are now privately owned. Portsmouth City Council, having decided like many other authorities, have so far decided not to sell their housing stock to housing associations and is still the major landlord in the area.

To their credit they have over the years carried out considerable improvements to their housing stock under the 'Decent Homes Initiative'. Windows and kitchens have been upgraded and other improvements made. Their repairs budget is considerable.

Several other housing associations have developed land as it has become available. The Tampax factory has been demolished and the site developed, likewise the Cricketers, Greyhound, and Wheatsheaf public houses have gone and housing built. The Warren public house site is now a car park. Other pieces of land and some garage sites will be developed in the near future.

While there are always objections to new houses being built there is an ever increasing need for houses which must be met somewhere.

We must remember that Havant residents in in the late forties were not happy to see the vast Leigh Park estate built on but it had to be because of the desperate need for new housing after the war. Fortunately the estate was built to a relatively low density, not like one sees on many private developments today.

There still are, and will remain, large areas of open space; Leigh Park gardens, the ancient woodland of Great Copse, Wakefords Copse, St Clares Copse, Sharps Copse, Bushy Lease and of course the vast area bordering the Hermitage Stream.

As the population fell from a peak of about 40,000 to the 30,000 we have today and the age profile increased the number of children dropped dramatically. This resulted in remaining Oak Park and Parkhouse schools' children being relocated in other schools and then being demolished. Likewise there was a proposal to close Staunton Park school but, after a considerable fight by parents, the decision being made to retain the school but to make it an academy, Havant Academy, the first academy school in Hampshire.

Park school had suffered for years with 'concrete cancer' caused by the salt in the concrete becoming damp and turning into an acid which rusted the iron reinforcing bars. In turn this then blew the concrete making the building unsafe. Although it fell victim to the closure of the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme Hampshire County Council decided that they had no option but to rebuild the school into the fine building we see today which was completed in
2015. Similarly Barncroft Infant and Junior schools were rebuilt and became Barncroft Primary School.

A different arrangement was made for the Trosnant Infant and Junior Schools and they became federated under a single head, but to all intents and purposes they operate as a primary school.

Having said that the child population was falling it is now rising again; so much so that there will be a shortage of school places and in order to address this the Trosnant School is shortly to be expanded to accommodate some 50% more pupils.

I think it is true to say that the make up of the Leigh Park population has slowly changed over the years. People have got older but at the same time with the right to buy many houses are being sold on to young couples looking for their first home. Although not cheap as such these houses are cheaper than many other in the area and they are ideal starter homes. No doubt many of these people will move on as indeed many are. The changes seen to the electoral registers show that there is a considerable ‘churn’ in the population.

The once thriving Park Parade and Greywell shopping centres have suffered like many high streets with the growth of out of town and on-line shopping. Their first blow came with the opening of the Co-op, now ASDA, hypermarket, not really out of town but within walking distance. In spite of promises made at the time the Co-op closed their Park Parade store and started the decline. Further developments in Havant have contributed also. However Lidl has shown some confidence and opened a store on the old Portsmouth housing office site.

The centres have changed hands several times but the present landlords are making an effort to get the shops let. It is to be hoped that these new shops will prove to be sustainable.

At long last the Dunsbury Hill Farm site has started to be developed and it is hoped that this will provide some much needed employment for Leigh Park people who have been for a long time the highest percentage number in the borough.

When the ambulances moved out of their depot in Bishopstoke Road the building was taken over by Highbury College who ran courses associated with the building trade. They called it the Apex Centre.

When they decided to move it was taken over in Park Community School who now also run courses in the the building trade for students who might be more interested in learning practical skills. Students from other schools also attend. Hopefully they will obtain qualifications which will enable them to move on and
take up full time apprenticeships. This will help fill the predicted shortage of employees in the building trade. The income from the rent of the building is dedicated to finance environmental projects in Leigh Park.

Many small schemes have been undertaken but one major scheme has been the upgrading of off-road footpaths to make them usable in all weathers. This work has entailed the laying over some 60 tonnes of material by those who have been given Community Pay Back Orders. They work to a high standard under the guidance of a supervisor. These footpaths, which have developed over the years as desire routes, are an important and well used facility for going to and from shops and schools as well as for just leisure walking, especially with dogs. Work has also been undertaken to improve Staunton Country Park.

The community centre in Dunsbury Way has been an important feature in the life of Leigh Park over the years. It has been run by the Leigh Park Community Association on which many volunteers have acted as Trustees. Unfortunately in 2016 they found it impossible for them to be able to run it as a viable concern and the association disbanded. Fortunately the lease was taken over by Community First, an organisation dedicated to running community services. The centre continued to be open without a break and, apart from the closure of the bar, will continue, and hopefully expand, to serve the community.

Making Space in Bishopstoke Road makes an important contribution by providing artistic events for adults and schoolchildren.

A successful Christmas Grotto has been run for a number of years in a shop unit, kindly given free of charge by the landlord, by a team of volunteers which grows each year. In 2015 over 400 children visited and received a present from Santa. A carnival and other events have been organised by the traders in the precincts.

Clearly when the estate was built the bicycle was king and few people had a motor car. The expansion of car ownership has caused enormous problems with the lack of adequate parking spaces. Many areas have been hardened up but at the expense of our green verges. In wet weather many that are left become churned up and are unsightly. Unfortunately the only answer is to lose more verges but it is hoped that other measures can be taken to mitigate their loss.

Care was taken when planning the estate to keep as many mature trees, especially Oaks, as possible. Sadly many have reached the end of their lives and have been lost. Although they are difficult to replace every effort must be made to plant new trees for future generations to enjoy.

As to myself the first view I had of Leigh park was from the crossbar of my father's bicycle during the war as he went round various of the navy camps selling
Sunday newspapers. We never had enough and they soon sold as we sat down just inside the main gates, we were not allowed in any further.

In 1944 I went into Battins Copse to find soldiers camped there not knowing they were being assembled for D-Day.

Later in 1948 I was surprised to find concrete roads had been laid and had a good time cycling up and down what was to be Purbrook Way.

In 1949 my father came home one Sunday afternoon and said he had heard there were houses occupied in Leigh Park and that we had better get up there quick and get their newspaper orders.

We eventually found the houses, no name of the road, (later Bramdean Drive) and, at the age of 12, this was my round for several weeks until Jack Cusworth’s shop opened in Botley Drive. We then passed the round to him and supplied him on a wholesale basis.

From this small beginning we eventually supplied 12 shops with some 10,000 copies a week for many years. Thus we saw the estate grow week by week as the demand for newspapers grew, in those days nearly every house had a newspaper.

Later I worked in four of these shops which were constantly busy especially on a Sunday. Hundreds of children coming in for their 5p and 10p mix-ups of ½p and 1p sweets; mother in the background saying no bubble gum.

I have been a Leigh Park councillor for 22 years helping to improve the estate and help with a variety of problems affecting residents.

I have also served as a governor at different times on six Leigh Park schools for over 36 years.

Our churches are still with us making a valuable contribution to the those of various faiths in the community although the former Botley Drive Baptist Church is now the Empower Community Church.

Clearly the social mix has changed from those early days when everyone was in the same boat. Although some are better off there are still many struggling with problems of unemployment and health.

The children in our schools are a credit to the estate. Unfortunately we have lost sight of most of them who grew up on the estate but we know that many have gone on and made a success of their lives and no doubt our present generation will continue to do so.

Who knows what the future may hold; I am sure it will only get better.
Community
The Parish Newspaper of St Francis, Leigh Park. May/June 1961. 3d.

Even parishioners who have lived in the area for only a short period will be aware of the way in which the Havant and Waterloo Urban District is being rapidly developed.

Those who have lived here since pre-war days have seen a complete transformation and yet even now it is difficult to see what is the final plan for the integrated Havant—Leigh Park—Bedhampton area.

The development with its growth of population and activity is far more rapid than even the planners envisaged. It is certainly more rapid than those responsible for providing social and voluntary services imagined.

And as the Church may well be described as being in that category it would be helpful if we who are the Church took stock of what has happened and what is likely to happen.

SOULS AND THEIR NEEDS
To the planner it is largely a matter of blue prints, buildings and statistics. To the Church it is a matter of human souls and their needs.

No one can deny that the Church in both Leigh Park and Bedhampton has made and is making valiant strides to meet the spiritual requirements of ever growing parishes.

In terms of buildings, Bedhampton has provided a new hall and sanctuary and is planning for other premises in the Barncroft—Park Farm area. Leigh Park has taken the first steps towards a thrilling new church.

These mean, and will mean increasingly as more clerical staff become available, more services and more opportunities for administering the Holy Sacraments and above all a continued building up of the parish family.

OTHER NEEDS
But the parish family has other needs—employment, shopping, facilities, schools, health centres and other social functions—and by our interest in the development that goes on around us so can these things be provided.

The object of the main article on this page is to sketch in something of the development of the area in recent years and describe some of the things to come. They affect us all and by our interest and prayers, by our votes and by our expressions of opinion in the right quarters we can see that the development is what the community really needs.
WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE GREATER HAVANT AREA?

MORE SHOPS, SCHOOLS, INDUSTRY AND SERVICES FOR TREBLED POPULATION - BIGGER NOW THAN WINCHESTER

The population of the Havant and Waterloo Urban District has more than doubled in the past eight years.

And in view of the fact that the largest of the new housing areas has sprung up in the Havant—Leigh Park—Bedhampton area, it would be no exaggeration to say that the population in the parishes covered by COMMUNITY has trebled at least in the same period.

More than half the Urban District’s 74,000 people are concentrated in this area, which means that this area alone is bigger than such towns as Petersfield, Romsey, Andover and even Winchester.

But they are ancient communities built up and provided for over many centuries. Their industries, shops and amenities have grown with them and life is on a much more even keel.

The new Havant has grown up by comparison overnight—hence the great activity with bricks and mortar, concrete and steel in many places.

Let us take shops, first. Apart from a few neighbourhood shopping areas at places like Belmont Park, the Park Lane roundabout, Middle Park Way, and St Christopher's Road, which fill the role of 'the shop on the corner,' shopping development is being concentrated in Havant.

100 NEW SHOPS

This is in accordance with the approved Development Plan which envisages the complete integration of Havant, Leigh Park and Bedhampton, and work is in progress on the building of nearly 100 new shops.

These are being provided by development companies who have apparently accepted the view that if adequate facilities arc provided in Havant people will remain in the area to do the bulk of their shopping instead of making the journey to Portsmouth or Chichester.

The shape of the new shopping area is now seen from the development so far achieved.

Forty-six shops are being built in the new Market Parade which will run from Elm Lane to North Street with a new paved approach to Havant Station.

And a further 28 shops are being provided in an arcade which will link the new road with West Street.
Meanwhile new shops are being built in West Street itself and the shopping area has turned round the corner into Park Road South.

**ATTRACTIVE CENTRE**

If the right kind of businesses are attracted to these new premises—some of which will be ready by the end of the year—Havant should indeed be an attractive shopping centre.

Meanwhile there are plans for more shops in the Park Parade area of Leigh Park.

But before shops must come employment to provide spending power and in the last two or three years has seen the considerable building up of the New Lane industrial area. Almost all of the area on the east side of the road has now been filled and plans have been approved for another big factory off Barton's Road.

At Brockhampton work is expected to begin soon on a large plastics factory which is planned to give employment to more than 2,000.

**SCHOOLS**

And now what of public services?

"Community" has frequently paid tribute to the Education Authority for the schools it has provided in such good measure in the Leigh Park area. But it has always stressed the need in Bedhampton.

One little school, which has long outgrown the needs of even infant children—the 5-7 year-olds—still does yeoman service. But the juniors have to journey daily to Havant and secondary and grammar school children go even further afield.

At long last there has come news of a site for a new junior school at Bedhampton. "Community" cannot yet disclose the whereabouts nor give a date for the building, but the urgent need is one step further towards being met.

**TO BE REBUILT**

And the Infants School, too, is to be rebuilt on the same site.

"Community" has campaigned for an infants’ school north of the main road—that is where the great majority of children live—but it seems there is no suitable site.

We can perhaps console ourselves by the fact that work on the Havant by-pass is to begin this year. It will result in a reduction of the main road traffic. And we can pay-tribute here to the work of the school crossing wardens.

And on the subject of roads, the long awaited making-up of Scratchface Lane is also to come this year.
NEW CHURCHES

At Leigh Park development in the immediate future is to include the Community Centre, the new Health Centre, an Ambulance Station, and a Police Station with accommodation for ambulance and police personnel.

All this will be in the Dunsbury Way area to link up with the further development northwards of the Park Parade shopping centre. Here too will be a new branch library.

Negotiations are proceeding, also, for the building in Leigh Park of possibly two blocks of special aged persons flats with warden and other facilities similar to our admirable Doyle House at Bedhampton.

Three different local authorities are involved here—hence the longer-than-usual negotiations—but everyone is agreed that it is a need to be met.

With already more than a dozen Schools built in the area in less than half that number of years, Leigh Park still cries out for more School places.

Work is already under way on the new school at Sharps Copse to cater for the fast developing Prospect Farm area, and extensions have been or are being provided at Park House, Barncroft, Front Lawn and Oak Park.

And even then people are wondering whether all this will be enough, although the pattern must inevitably change as the district grows up.

Also planned, to be built in a corner of the playing fields of Broom Field Secondary School, is a special school for educationally sub-normal children.

RELENTLESSLY

And so it goes on, almost relentlessly and often bewilderingly so that even those most closely connected with the planning find themselves having to meet conflicting interest in trying to decide what is best for the community at large.

We are apt to make caustic comments about planners and councillors generally when we see this or that going up or coming down, and when our own little corner of the world is disturbed.

The people who represent us in this way are our fellow parishioners. Theirs is a difficult job. They need our prayers and our proper understanding of the job of building a community—a Christian community. That at least must be our part of the building
Havant Town Ladies Football Club

Left to right: Back row: Paula Hall, Michelle Green, Andrea Bishop, Amanda Fleet, Kirsten Davy, Sue Harris, Heidi Gunner. Front row: Lucy Piper, Janice Goble, Sam Read, Jo Lockton, Helen Warner.

Havant Ladies FC was founded in July of 1988 with nine enthusiastic players of mixed ability, no kit, no equipment, and a determined manager. Our first session saw us playing organised competitive football travelling as far afield as Maidstone and London, with Worthing and Brighton the most local of our fixtures. Often struggling to field a full side we never lost our ambition and determination. However, on that rare occasion when we managed to field thirteen players, still striving for our first point of the season, our visitors, Ashford Ladies, sitting undefeated at the top of the division, found themselves on the wrong end of a 5-0 thrashing and never regained the top spot, finishing mid-table. We avoided relegation by three points but had laid the foundations for what was to become a double-winning season.

The league and divisional cup double was achieved in 1989-90 by strengthening the squad, consistently fielding virtually the same thirteen players throughout the season, and adopting a stringent fitness programme. One player who gave up sex, cigarettes and alcohol confided: "Although the sacrifice was made in the interest of the team, it was the worst twenty minutes of my life." We conceded only 15 goals in 24 league and cup games, inclusive of pre-season friendlies, scoring over 80 times in the process.

Recent seasons have seen the club fielding various combinations of senior and junior sides. Our current teams are first and reserve teams at senior level and an under-14 side embarking on their first ever competitive season.

Leigh Park News, October 1994
Leigh Park Councillor Ralph Cousins and County Councillor Alan Wright opening the refurbished library in Greywell in the 1990s. *Evening News*

Bramdean Drive after occupation. *AF Milton Collection*
1st Leigh Park Company Girl Guides in the Cricketer’s Inn hut, 1957. Guide Leader Mrs Isobel Cousins, third on the right.

Donald Lake and Terry ? in the Stockheath School playground circa 1959
The boys’ entrance to Oak Park school in Leigh Road. Boys caught cycling through the gates received a clip round the ear from the deputy head Mr Collins.

Main Block and Art Block. To the left was the Technical Block with the masters’ rest room below it. The former gym was to the right. Bob Hind
The first Leigh Park library in Stockheath Lane opened on 7 October 1957. It moved to Greywell in 1970. Geoff Salter

The front of the Tampax factory in Dunsbury Way

Aerial view of the Tampax factory later called Tambrands, Minimodels, the Corporation bus depot, dairy and petrol station. *AF Milton Collection*
Nissen Huts at the Stockheath Naval camp

Prefabricated bungalow similar to those erected in Havant Way after the Second World War
Flooding in Corhampton Crescent, 26 October 1949

A proper butcher’s shop in park Parade
The Wheatsheaf public house in Botley Drive

The Leigh Park police station on the corner of Dunsbury Way and Bishopstoke Road
The Greyhound public house in Park Parade now the site of the Greywell Heights flats

The Warren public house. *A F Milton collection*
The Cricketers public house and community hall, Stockheath Common. *AF Milton collection*

The Fox public house at West Leigh after closure in 2013
The rent office at 230 Dunsbury Way

Portsmouth Corporation buses line up ready to take residents on their ‘Rent March’ to protest at the proposed increases to their rents. *AF Milton Collection*
F. W. Woolworth moved from Havant to Park Parade and then to Greywell before finally closing. In every shopping area photographs there are prams and pushchairs everywhere thus showing how young the estate once was.
'Woolies' well stocked shop is sadly missed. *A F Milton collection*

Leigh Road, now Petersfield Road, looking north in the 1920s. Stockheath Road is on the left and West Leigh Road, now Martins Road, on the right.
A busy Park Parade in the 1960s. *Alf Harris*
Greywell Precinct shortly after opening. Tesco was originally Victor Value with Webb’s furniture store opposite. Plenty of prams and pushchairs and a couple of Vespa motor cycles. *AF Milton collection*

Park Parade in the 1960s. *Alf Harris*
Early shops in Park Parade, 1950s. Ralph Cousins’ 14 h.p. Wolseley motor car is on the left.

The first shops in Stone Square, 1950s
Barncroft Way, 1950s. Messrs Burnett and Pipers’ shop is on the left

The opening by the mayor, Councillor Claude Ludbrook, of the Havant Town Football club premises
A long gone bank and shoe shop. *AF Milton collection*

Battens Way 1953 coronation street party
The cast of Robin Hood. The first production of the Young Wives group performed in the Cricketers’ hut in the early 50s. Marion Walker

Displaced Persons (DPs) from the Baltic States built this monument to the memory of their fellow country people at their camp in the Fraser Road area of Bedhampton. 1947. Alan Bell
The pancake race along Riders Lane started by the Young Wives group in 1954, *Marion Walker*

The former Stockheath Camp swimming pool that was much enjoyed by early residents. Leigh Park house can just be seen in the background. *Bob Hind*

Some of the children who did have a school to go to. Riders School pupils circa 1956. Marion Walker
The Minimodels factory in New Lane opened in 1954 and initially produced toys such as Startex and Scalex, these being tin-plate, clockwork models accurately based on cars of the period. Fred Francis, the owner of Minimodels, suggested the idea of Scalextric in 1956 and by Christmas the following year it had become the fastest growing, best-selling toy of the day. In 1958 the company was taken over by Lines Brothers (Triang). Changes included the introduction of the plastic range of cars in 1960 and a move to new premises in Fulfllood Road, Leigh Park, in 1961 where the picture records the 'test-bed' layout of cars and track. There followed a gradual running down of the factory until 1970 when Scalextric production was moved to Kent.
St Francis was the first purpose-built church on Leigh Park estate. Before this, services were held in a prefabricated hall at the rear of the new church. The Archdeacon of Portsmouth, the Venerable Michael Peck, laid the foundation stone of the church on 25 November 1962, which was consecrated by the Bishop of Portsmouth, Dr John Phillips, on 30 November 1963.

Trosnant School Netball Team 1964-65 are all smiles for the camera as they pose proudly with their own shield, having achieved a sporting double for the school. Headmaster John Hunt, with the school's sports mistress.
In 2001 St Michaels and All Angels Roman Catholic Church was hit by lightning and had to be rebuilt.

Illustration of the proposed reservoir that may or may not one day be built.
Aerial view of the lake and Leigh Park gardens. The location of the second house is shown at the top of the picture.
Leigh Park
Memory Boxes

Borrow a Box and discover the past and present in Leigh Park.

Making Space has four Memory Boxes that can be borrowed. These are filled with a range of heritage materials to inspire your group or school. Each box contains photographs, objects to handle and view and a list of suggested activities to engage users in exploring what Leigh Park means to them.

You and your group can explore shared histories and stories. Users can bring in their own photographs and objects, be creative and investigate past and present life in Leigh Park.

From 2011 - 2014 Making Space ran a project called On The Street Where We Live. The project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and involved over 1000 local people. The boxes were made by artist Jon Lockhart and were inspired by his work in Leigh Park where local people told stories, gave photographs and memorabilia.

To borrow a box:
Just contact Making Space on 023 9247 2491 or email admin@makingspace.org
Boxes can be borrowed for one day or more and the borrower needs to collect and return the box to Making Space.

To find out more please visit:
makingspace.org/leigh-park-memory-boxes/

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Park Community Enterprises is a not for profit company that has been set up by four senior members of staff at Park Community School to enable students to gain training, work experience and key employability skills. This has been achieved by the setting up of a number of small commercial businesses at which students take part in all of the stages of running a small business, the first of these is Park Design and Print. Park Design and Print have a range of modern digital printing equipment and are able to produce, to a commercial standard, a full range of printed and personalised promotional items.

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