

THE HOOKS IN EASTCOTE

by John William Hook

Earlier this year, John Hook wrote to the Society with recollections of his family's and his own times living in our area, and we are pleased to publish them here. These have been compiled from his own knowledge and observations over the years, plus information received through family experience and folklore. Some further information has been added by the RNELHS for clarification.

I was born at Hillingdon Hospital on the 11 December 1937 to Mrs Lillian Hook, née Buckle, and Mr William Joseph Hook of Wiltshire Lane, Eastcote. I lived with them until 1942 when my parents divorced, and I was then raised by one of my father's sisters and her husband in Ruislip Manor. During that time I attended Lady Bankes Primary School and took my secondary education at Pinner County Grammar School. I remained with my uncle and aunt until 1958 when I married. My wife and I lived in South Ruislip and then Northwood Hills before moving subsequently to Gerrards Cross. I joined the Metropolitan Police and initially served at Ruislip, Northwood and Uxbridge. I continued to serve in that area for about 12 years before moving on to other parts of the Metropolis.

The first Hook in Eastcote was, as far as I am aware, my great-grandmother, Louisa, known respectfully and affectionately as 'Granny Hook'. No mention was ever made of a Grandfather Hook. Granny Hook lived in a semi-detached cottage on the west corner of Field End Road at the junction with Bridle Road. These cottages were on a piece of land next to Field End Lodge, now the Tudor Lodge Hotel. Granny Hook lived in the left-hand house of the pair as viewed from the road (Fig. 1). I don't know if she originated from that area and I don't know the composition of her family, except that one of her sons was my grandfather, William James Hook [see caption to Fig. 1, below, for further information].

William James Hook enlisted as a soldier in the Royal Hussars but was later discharged, medically unfit, with rheumatic fever. I don't know if it was his army career which took him there, but he was living in the Ham Common area of Richmond when he married Lydia Grace Boxshall (my grandmother). Their eldest child, William Joseph Hook (my father), was born in Ham about 1906 and suffered with pleurisy. His parents noticed that their son's health seemed to



Fig. 1 – Mount Pleasant cottages, Field End (built c.1847, demolished 1968)

Louisa 'Granny' Hook, husband George and four of their children were living here at the time of the 1911 census, which shows her to be from Colnbrook and George from Tetsworth, Oxfordshire. At the time of the 1901 census, the family was in Thorpe, Chertsey, with nine of their children living at home, including William James. George is entered as a stockman on a farm in 1901 and as a dairy cowman in 1911 (RNELHS, 1929)

improve when visiting Granny Hook, and apparently this was one of the reasons for their doctor recommending that the family move to Eastcote. This they did when my father was about seven years of age.

Initially they lived in Cheney Street and my grandfather worked as a gardener for Lady Anderson [see RNELHS Journal, 1999] at Eastcote Place, an imposing house off Field End Road near the corner with Eastcote High Road. As my father's health deteriorated further, the family moved to High Road Cottages (Fig. 2) where, for a short time, my grandfather and grandmother ran a small sweet shop. The family then moved to tied accommodation in Wiltshire Lane. This was known as The Old Cottage and was one of three in a structure known as The Homestead, owned by my grandfather's employer, Lady Anderson (Fig. 3). My grandfather died in his early thirties, leaving my grandmother with four children. These were my father, William Joseph; a second son, Reginald; a daughter, Stella, and a baby of three months, Vera (Fig. 4).

Clearly, my grandmother was in dire circumstances and took in washing and ironing for Lady Anderson and other better-off families. This was particularly difficult as the cottage had no gas or electricity. Lighting was by candle,

cooking and water-heating was by stove, and the only toilet was in the garden. To her absolute credit, and as a measure of her compassion, Lady Anderson allowed my grandmother to remain in the cottage at a very nominal rent and included in her will that my grandmother should remain her responsibility for the rest of my grandmother's life. Hence, when Lady Anderson's son demolished The Homestead in 1958, one of the bungalows built to replace it was allocated to my grandmother at the same low rent, and she remained there until she died. My grandmother did whatever was necessary to support herself and her four children. This included work as a barmaid in The Ship Inn and The Woodman in Joel Street and The Black Horse in Eastcote High Road. It was at The Black Horse that she met her second husband Alfred George Goddard, another gardener [at Woodman's Nurseries, Pinner]. This marriage produced a son, George Alfred Goddard, who remained with his mother until her death.

Insofar as the rest of the family is concerned, my parents lived briefly in Jackets Lane, Northwood in about 1928. They then moved to a council house in Wiltshire Lane. My recollection of that house was that it appeared to be made of concrete and was the last house on the right from



Fig. 2 – High Road Cottages, on the left, pictured here c.1910

No. 3, nearest to Ramin, was home to William James in 1914 [ref. RNUDC Ratebook]
 These cottages stood in front of The Old Shooting Box which at this date
 [see RNELHS Journal 2006] housed Belgian refugees. (RNELHS)



**Fig. 3 - The Homestead, Wiltshire Lane,
owned by Lady Anderson of Eastcote Place, was divided into three cottages.**
(National Monuments Record, 1957)

Norwich Road. Before the war my father was a milk deliveryman and pulled a milk cart for Robarts' Dairies in Joel Street (Fig. 5). He, my mother and their four children lived at this house until their divorce during WWII. His brother Reg married Ivy and they lived at 28 Rochester Road until Reg's death. His sister Stella married Horace Pepperrell, a Ruislip postman, and they lived in Ruislip Manor. His younger sister, Vera, lived in Somerfield Close, opposite my grandmother's cottage, and after the death of their mother their half-brother George took accommodation in Jackets Lane, where he stayed until his own death in 2008.

My father spent most of World War II at RAF Stanwell, near what is now London Heathrow Airport. It was there that he met and eventually married the woman who was to replace my mother as his wife. My mother was evicted from the house in Wiltshire Lane. My father 'allowed her to keep' my three elder sisters (at her own expense), but I, as the only boy, was destined for a children's home until after the war. My father's elder sister, Stella, prevented this from happening by giving me a home, ostensibly until the war ended, but in the event I stayed with aunt Stella, her husband and child until my own marriage at the age of 21 years. I never did live with my father and his new wife, and in addition I was prevented from having any contact with my mother and sisters until I found them, of my own volition, at the age of 18 years.



**Fig. 4 - The Hook family, with parrot,
in front of their home, The Old Cottage,
the central dwelling in The Homestead.
Lydia Hook and, left to right, William
Joseph, Stella and Reginald, c.1915.**
(Author's possession)



**Fig. 5 – William Joseph Hook
at work with his milk cart in the 1930s**
(Author's possession)

After the war, my father formed his own business, delivering fruit and vegetables in Eastcote, and progressed from this by opening his own shop (W.J. Hook) in Field End Road. I gather that he was successful and eventually had his own public house in Watford. He and I became estranged.

As a boy, I grew up mindful of how good the Andersons had been to my family. Popular opinion was that there were rich people and there were poor people. The poor were expected to bitterly dislike the rich who, it was assumed, were expected to use and abuse the poor, whom they were expected to hold in contempt. I was only a child when I heard about the Andersons, but their kindness has stayed with me to this day.

What do I remember about WWII? I was only 8 years old when it ended but some things stay with me. I remember German prisoners of war erecting pre-fabricated houses (pre-fabs) in Wiltshire Lane opposite The Old Cottage. I was there one very hot summer's day when my grandmother opened her front door to find a German POW, who asked for a drink of water. My grandmother responded with a bottle of water to share with his fellow POWs. My aunt Vera, whose husband was fighting in the RAF in Malta, was furious, accusing her mother of helping the 'killer Huns'. My grandmother replied that she hoped that somewhere in Italy, Africa, France or

Germany some person would give any of her sons a drink of water. I have repeated that story to my own German friends, who live in Cologne and who, I know, pass it on to their own colleagues. I was proud of my grandmother.

I remember walking down Wiltshire Lane with my aunt Stella, with whom I was then living. It was dark and we saw a soldier in uniform coming towards us. As he passed under the street lamp at Egerton Close, my aunt recognised him to be her brother, Reginald. He had apparently just returned from the Dunkirk landings and was on his way to my grandmother's house. Sometime later he apparently left to rejoin his unit, but I was at The Old Cottage when there was a visit by the police, asking after him. Reg was eventually found living in the chicken house in the garden. Only his mother knew of this and had kept him fed. Presumably he would have been classified as a coward.

Some years later, after WWII, Reg was driving a lorry for the British Oxygen Company at Wembley. There was a serious train crash at Harrow & Wealdstone station [1952] in which many were killed and injured. Later, my uncle Reginald's BOC lorry was found on the railway bridge overlooking the station, and rescuers reported seeing a man in uniform helping with the rescue attempts. Reginald was later found in the same chicken house in his mother's garden. Was he really a coward?

And now?

To date I have been married for 55 years. My wife Margaret (née Kehl) and I met and married in Ruislip Manor. After a brief period working for the Midland Bank, followed by National Service, I joined the Metropolitan Police and at the end of my Metropolitan Police career Margaret and I spent eight years with the Royal Oman Police in Muscat. We now live in Ludlow, Shropshire.

Is that the end of the Hooks in the Eastcote area? I think not. My eldest grandson has recently chosen to make his home in Ruislip.

What a good choice.

