

EASTLEIGH: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LATE VICTORIAN RAILWAY TOWN

Eastleigh and Aldershot are perhaps the most distinctive of Hampshire's Victorian new towns. The original bases – the railway for Eastleigh and the Army for Aldershot – remain significant in both places, even if their degree of dominance has diminished. The evolution of Eastleigh may be divided into three phases: first, the period before the establishment of any manufactories (say, before 1889); second, that of railway dominance (say, 1889 to 1960) and, third, the present phase of diverse employment, both within and outside the town. The carriage and wagon works had begun operation by 1889, and the locomotive works by 1909. Other industries, such as Pirelli General Cables and Sir Joseph Causton, Printers, were established after the First World War, but provided far less work than the railway company. That the arrival of these two important railway facilities was of great importance to the town is supported by the census returns. During the 1880s the population more than tripled and in the first decade of the present century there was a doubling in the number of inhabitants, followed by much smaller increases down to 1931. (The census returns for Eastleigh are: 515 (1871); 1,017 (1881); 3,613 (1891); 7,779 (1901, with Bishopstoke); 15,247 (1911); 15,617 (1921); 19,069 (1931).)

Eastleigh differs from such railway settlements as Swindon and Ashford, where works were set up in the 1840s, and company housing was erected in proximity to a nearby established town. Initially, the new settlements had their own names – New Swindon and Alfred Town (later Ashford New Town) – but these have fallen out of use. Eastleigh has rather more in common with Crewe, as both were built at a distance from existing towns. Both were located at important railway junctions, when there was employment in railway workshops and on the operating side, for engine drivers, guards and station staff. (Socially, the engineers and the other railway workers maintained a degree of separation.) But in other respects, the histories of

Eastleigh and Crewe differ. For instance, chronologically, railway engineering at Eastleigh was established about half-a-century later than the operating side (Course 1973). Neither is there any parallel to the political dominance in the town of Francis W Webb, Locomotive Superintendent in Crewe. When the locomotive works were transferred from Battersea to Eastleigh in 1909, Dugald Drummond, the Locomotive Superintendent of the London and South Western Railway, did not even live in Eastleigh, but commuted daily from his home in Surbiton. His successor, Urie, lived in Hill Lane, Southampton. However, it must be conceded that William Panter, the superintendent of the carriage and wagon works, had his residence in Eastleigh and played some part in local affairs.

Drummond and Urie were not alone in commuting to work for, in the period of about 50 years before there were any railway workshops at Eastleigh, most of the operating staff based on the junction lived in Southampton. However, this is not to suggest that there was no settlement at Eastleigh before the coming of the works. There were very few dwellings, but by 1868 evolution had reached the stage when a small church was provided (Pevsner & Lloyd 1967). Nevertheless, it could be argued that a tradition of Eastleigh workers living elsewhere had become established before the works arrived.

In addition to having a unique chronology, Eastleigh was distinctive geographically, with a ring of alternative dwelling places surrounding it. It was reasonably convenient to live at Northam, Southampton (5 miles), Romsey (7 miles), Farcham (10 miles) or Winchester (6 miles). Not only were these places accessible but, because the company's servants either travelled free or at greatly reduced fares, journeys to and from Eastleigh were not financially onerous. Reinforcing the ease of commuting, the lack of housing in the new town was another reason for the high proportion of non-residents. Railway companies tended to limit their expenditure on housing to what

they considered necessary for the recruitment, availability and retention of their staff. In Eastleigh, Campbell Road ('Spike Island') and the few dwellings on the west side of the railway line were mainly inhabited by operating staff, especially locomotive crews based on the engine shed, moved from Northam in 1903. Dutton Lane was occupied by workshop staff, but these were mostly volunteer firemen, on call for fire duty. The sparse provision of company housing in Eastleigh was both the cause and the effect of the high proportion of voluntary workers commuting daily to work.

In view of its comparatively short history, it

is not surprising that little has been written about Eastleigh. Drewitt wrote the first history in 1935, and in 1967 Dr Brian Turton included Eastleigh in his survey of the railway towns of southern England (Turton 1967). Eighteen years later came a most useful survey of the formative period by Brian Luffman, a descendant of the London people who moved into Hampshire with the railway works (Luffman 1985). Amplification of some of Luffman's points have been made by Robertson (1986). Because of its distinction among the Victorian railway towns of Britain, it is hoped that more writers will consider Eastleigh as worthy of their attention.

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