

The Mid-fifties in Epsom

On the 1st March 1955, my parents, Cecil and Grace Palmer, my younger brother, Michael, and I (24 years old at the time) moved from Streatham to Epsom where we noticed the air was noticeably fresher than in London.

Having moved out of our Streatham house and driven to Epsom, we enjoyed a well-earned lunch at the Charter Inn in the High Street before going to Hookfield to receive our furniture. It was a cold day for moving and attempted to snow from time to time.



The Charter Inn c.1960

The train journey to the City of London where my father and I worked took twice as long now but was well worth it on arrival home. At some point there was a rail strike and we drove up to the office every day which meant that I arrived late. This did not go unnoticed and I was reproved because a coach had been organised for the benefit of the staff. Thankfully, I discovered there was one train running at the appropriate time, so I was relieved!



Ely's and Epsom Market 1958

There was much less traffic in Epsom in those days and no railings or flowers down the centre of the High Street. Lester Bowden by the Clock Tower was a prominent shop for menswear and riding gear. Ely's was the department store near South street – I bought some of my trousseau there in due course – but in the main the shops were small businesses including the building with bow-fronted windows near the Clock Tower (now occupied by Lloyds Pharmacy) which was of particular interest to us because my grandmother, Grace Young, lived there as a child.



Laurence Olivier in Henry V

The Odeon Cinema was at the back of the shops facing the station and I remember in particular on one of the hottest nights of the year going to see Laurence Olivier in 'Henry V' – oblivious of the heat! Nearby in Waterloo Road was a small building which housed the Library.



Epsom's Public Library in Waterloo Road 1952

On one exceedingly cold night my father put a small electric heater in the loft to prevent the pipes from freezing (no central heating then). Alas, before midnight the

loft was well ablaze. The speed and efficiency of the fire crew quickly dealt with it but it earned a reprimand from the Fire Chief in the following week's local papers for his foolishness!

As a member of the Streatham Congregational Church my membership was in due course transferred to the Epsom Church but I was not happy there. Only the minister was interested because my Grandmother played the organ there many years before. (Sadly the church was burnt down in 1961 but was subsequently rebuilt on the same site and from 1972 became known as the United Reformed Church). Meanwhile on the 5th October 1957 my fiancé Tony Jones and I were married at the friendlier Ewell Congregational Church by the Rev Jonathan P Evans and in the course of time our two daughters were christened there.



Epsom Congregational Church, Fire Damage West End 1961

Our wedding reception was held at the RAC Woodcote Park, where my father was a member. My husband and I were driven from Ewell to the Club through Epsom High Street and I remember feeling like the Queen and waving to the Saturday morning shoppers! It was a glorious spring-like day which meant that the guests were able to gather on the lawn at the RAC and enjoy the sunshine.

In the two and a half years that I lived in Epsom, I was not very much aware of the rhythm of daily life because I worked in London on weekdays and alternate Saturday mornings. However, I know there were Cypriot women who called from house to house selling their beautiful and hard-wearing lace, hand-made and rather expensive. I still enjoy using those my mother bought. At Race times there were the not-altogether welcome visits from gypsies who were free with their curses if you didn't buy their sprigs of heather 'for luck!' Also I recall my father gave one of his

shirts to a down-on-his-luck race-goer who rang the bell on the off chance of getting some sympathy.

I liked living in Epsom in the Fifties, even for such a short time, and still enjoy visiting the town from Banstead now that my son and his wife and their children live there.

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