

Our Good Neighbours - Selsdon during the 1940s

Selsdon lacked a local pub for many years. Eventually circa the 1960s The Good Neighbour was built in the Addington Rd to fill this void in community life. However it did not last for very many years, being demolished to make way for the car park which is now beside the Aldi super market. For those who are interested in our village history there is a photo at: https://www.francisfrith.com/selsdon/selsdon-the-good-neighbour-c1965_s613054 .

But my memories of good neighbours go back to many years earlier.

Ivy and Doug Parr were my god parents. They lived half way down Abbey Rd, near the Green. During the war there was a large concrete water tank there, built to assist the emergency services in fire fighting from incendiary bombs. After the war when the tank was removed, the Green became the focal point for Guy Fawkes Nights. A giant bonfire would be lit and everyone would bring along some fireworks to make it a special event.



The Parr's had a daughter Pauline and she had a younger brother, David, who was in the class below me at Selsdon Primary School. But of course he was a good friend of mine, long before we went to school.

One thing that children love is a birthday party. I would go to David's parties, he would come to mine, and we would go to parties of other friends. By today's standards of no expense spared events, ours were very simple affairs, but we enjoyed them greatly. The catering was determined by ration coupons and what the shops actually had in stock. The food consisted principally of sandwiches. At one party it might be chocolate spread, at another, marmite or perhaps honey or peanut butter, things which we would not normally get, so it made a party a special event.

I am not sure if it was an idea of David's Dad or his uncle Laurie, but between them they had a fantastic party game for us – Bomber Pilot.

We all took a turn at being the pilot, but first we all had to leave the room and go in one by one for our turn. This was so that we did not know what to expect. The procedure was this:

We sat on a kitchen chair, blind folded and with a coat over our head so that we could see absolutely nothing. Once blindfolded, the two men, one in front and one behind, would then put a couple of broomsticks under the chair. One would then give a commentary of what was happening, something like this:

“We are taking off and climbing to 5,000 feet”, and with the broomsticks the chair was lifted off the floor and a little bit of shaking added to simulate level flight. Then suddenly: “Enemy fighter, angels one-five. Bank, bank, bank!” and the chair was tipped a to one side. “Enemy now on your tail – bank left, left, left!” and the chair was tipped the other way. “He’s opening fire!” some sound effects and shaking of the chair.

“We’ve been hit” big shake of chair

“We’re going down, we’re going to crash –brace, brace, brace,” and the chair would be lowered to the floor quite quickly with a bump.

Being blindfolded and thus disorientated, the story and slight movements of the chair were magnified so that to the “pilot” it felt as though all the “violent” manoeuvres had really occurred.

It was a very simple, psychological trick but made a fantastic party game!

But normal daily life carried on. Mr Parr, who like my Dad, was too old to serve in the Forces during WW2, instead made the daily trudge to his job in the City of London. His relaxation was his vegetable garden, which together with his chickens, helped to put food on the table – ours included. After the war ended, he knocked down the Anderson bomb shelter and used the below ground part as a big compost pit. He greatly enjoyed showing off the huge marrows that he grew there, and they took pride of place in the display at Selsdon School’s Harvest Day Festivals.

The mention of festivals reminds me of the first big party of the 1940s. This was the Abbey Rd and Greville Ave, Victory, street party, which included a huge bonfire. This left a large burnt circle in the road, which still remained when I moved away from Selsdon nearly 20 years later in 1963. And in following year, 1946, to celebrate the Victory over Japan, there was another big party held in Selsdon Recreation Ground. The latter, including a group photo, I made mention of in an earlier item. (see <https://selsdon-residents.co.uk/resources/5a.%20Selsdon%20as%20a%20Community%201940.pdf>)

But with the war over, things were changing as life slowly returned to a peaceful footing, with new challenges.