

Some Different School Days Circa 1950

When one of my grandsons went to our local primary school, I got involved in running cross country training which culminated each year in the Croydon primary school championships. As a result of this, I later got invited to accompany the Year 6 boys and girls on the annual, week's visit, originally to Holland, and in later years to Normandy. Always a most enjoyable and educational week's holiday for me! If you want to know about William the Conqueror and the Bayeux Tapestry, or The Airbourne Divisions' landings at Pegasus Bridge and the artificial "Mulberry" harbour at Arromanches, then I'm the person to ask!

However the most moving experience was always the visit to the war graves at Normandy, where each child laid a poppy they had made, at a grave of their choice. And there are thousands to choose from!



***The Latin engraving on the Memorial arch is so apt. It translates as:
"We, once conquered by William, have now set free the Conqueror's native land"***

But when I went to Selsdon Primary school in the mid 1940s school visits just did not happen. However there is always an exception to any rule, and I was lucky enough to benefit from just one such exception. This was when I was an eight year old in Class C, and where do you think we went on this special school outing? My old Hooky, stomping ground – Selsdon Wood!

It was one of those bright sunny mornings in late November, when there was a thick frost. On that particular day it was an exceptionally thick frost. So much so that it was the inspiration for our class outing. Our lady teacher, whose name escapes me, took us on a walk along the Addington Rd, past the smelly pig farm, and down the wooded footpath to Selsdon Wood. It was a great walk, not just because it was a morning out of the classroom, but also because of the beautiful, crystalline patterns of the frost on everything. Whilst I cannot remember the teacher's name I have never forgotten that magical walk through our local, frozen countryside.

And another outing. A couple of years later when I was probably in Class A at Selsdon Primary, I got chosen to represent our school at the inter school sports. These were being held at the R.A.F sports field at Kenley Aerodrome. (It was still a military aerodrome then).

Also in my class and chosen to represent our school, was Tania Belli who lived in Kingsway Ave. She was a very good runner.

In the absence of a bus to Sanderstead, our party of budding athletes and accompanying teachers, walked from the school to Sanderstead Pond. From there we caught the green, Country bus, the 403, to Hamsey Green.



At Hamsey Green we walked along Tithe Pit Shaw Lane, cut across the common down to Whyteleafe, then up the long, steep climb of Whyteleafe Hill, to eventually arrive at the aerodrome sports field at Kenley. Of course we had to do the same thing in reverse going home!

I don't remember anything about the sports meeting, but after all that walking I obviously didn't do very well in my race, but I think Tania did. Now Tania was not the only sporty member of her family. Phil Munton in his memories of old Selsdon, makes mention of Tania's oldest brother, Bernie (there were at least 4 brothers and an older sister named Sonia). Phil mentioned Bernie Belli being in the Selsdon cricket club, captained by my next door neighbour, Mr Noakes. But Bernie was not just a cricketer, he was Selsdon C.Cs equivalent of Ian Botham, being a top ranking bowler and batsman for many years until his eye sight caused his retirement from the game.

Moving on to more recent times, the 403, green Country bus, is still running on the same route, Warlingham to West Croydon, except that it is now a red bus. There used to be a Country bus garage known as the Chelsham garage, at Warlingham, except that the site is now the Sainsbury super market along the Limpsfield Rd.

Not much remains to remind me of the world, as I knew it as a school boy in Selsdon, during the 1940s and 50s. With the re-union dinner of Old Boys and Girls of Selsdon School being held in October, I hope that some of my reminiscences will jog a few memories of attendees to liven up the conversations!

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