

Selsdon's Auld Lang Syne

Every New Year's Eve we sing Auld Lang Syne which means long, long, ago. When I was at Selsdon School I thought that history was boring – just dates, names and events from long, long ago. This year I will be an octogenarian and looking back, I realise that I am part of history. But now I don't call it history, I call it nostalgia!

Every now and again something is said, or happens, and I say to my now grown up children, "Now that reminds me of" but instead of boring my kids, they say, "Dad you ought to write all this down because once you are gone, all of these stories are lost for ever." But of course I never did. It would take too much time. But then something else was said that changed all that. So another story!

A few years back I got to know a gent named Frank who is a Selsdon resident. Naturally I told him that I was brought up as a child in Selsdon. Then last September Frank asked me if I had been at Selsdon School during the war, because a reunion was being held. I answered in the affirmative and told him that I remembered learning the ABC and 2 x table in the school air raid shelters, whilst doodlebugs flew overhead. It was then suggested that perhaps I could write an article for the Selsdon Gazette. As it happened I managed to stretch it to two! These appeared in the October and November Gazettes.

When I later received a copy of the November Gazette I read a report on the school reunion. It mentioned a few names of old residents which did not ring any bells with me. However there was also a poem, which named a number of teachers who had been at Selsdon School during the war years. Some of whom I did remember from those long ago days. There was also a letter to the Editor from my friend Frank Kippen who had started all this off!

December came, and out of the blue I received an e-mail from a Michael J Fox, a resident of California. To my amazement, he had read my two articles about my Selsdon school days. With this e-mail was a five page, encyclopaedic listing of events, places and people who were, or had lived in Selsdon going back very many years. And there on page 5 was a notation: **Abbey Rd, Michael DONOHOE and Desmond** – it was me and my brother!

This made me sit up and pay more attention, and brought me back to how I started this little story – Auld Lang Syne, of which the opening line is, *Should auld acquaintance be forgot*. Whilst I could not recall a Michael J Fox, I did now remember a boy in Selsdon some 70 odd years ago, who I knew just as Michael Fox. An auld acquaintance who I had forgotten!

Reading his listing and accompanying detail, the memories came flooding back with these details. A bombing incident: – ***115 Sundale Ave. This house (opposite Benhurst Gardens) was destroyed by a direct hit in March 1944; Geoffrey Sarson's grandparents were killed.***

When I had written my first memoir for the Selsdon Gazette - Selsdon Through the Eyes of a War Baby - I had written:

“.....And there was a short cut to the shops by going over a bomb site in Sundale Ave (previously a row of terraced houses), into Dulverton Rd and then along the footpath into the Addington Rd by where Aldi now is.”

The very same bombing incident referred to by Michael Fox, above!

And he goes on to write, that at the time of this bombing incident he was living in Sundale Ave: - ***The bomb referred to above damaged our house extensively and we moved to 101 Benhurst Gardens, where the road turns by Benhurst Close. I lived there until August 1945, with Dick Poore and his father.***

In 1945/6 I used to help Nobby Clark, the Express Dairy milkman on Saturdays, mainly because he let me 'drive' the horse. Come 1947, I had to go to school on Saturday mornings.

I also used to help Nobby Clark the milkman, and for the same reason – because I was allowed to take the reins and tell Emily the horse to “Gee-up!” And especially for the thrill of sitting, high up on the milk cart, when Emily got up speed going down the steep hills of Ingham Rd and Kingsway Ave on our return to Sundale Ave. No doubt Michael knew where I lived because he delivered the milk to our house, just as I knew where he lived because I delivered milk and collected payment for the week’s deliveries, at his house. Isn’t it a small world, all this 70 years ago!

But there is much more than this. Michael is 4 years older than me, so his school friends and acquaintances were not mine, but many of their younger brothers and sisters, were mine. For example he notes: - ***Margaret ROBERTSON and Jean FINCH in Benhurst Close*** (who lived just around the corner from Michael when he got bombed out from his house in Sundale Ave).

I knew Margaret Robertson, her house backed onto Selsdon Rec and there was a gate from her garden into the Rec. I first got to know her because she was a first class cricketer, unusual for a girl in the early 1950s. She was both a good bowler and batsman. Oops! Sorry, we are not in the 1950s, a good bats person! Margaret had three brothers, the oldest, Johnny, was also a very good cricketer. I was not up to their standard but I regularly played cricket with them in the Rec.



The cricket pavilion in the Rec with Benhurst Gds behind

Johnny Robertson became my best friend from circa 1950 until some years later when the family moved away from Selsdon. I even went on summer holidays with them, once to Hythe and another time to Westward Ho! on the north coast of Devon.

And Jean Finch, of course I knew her too. She lived opposite my friend Johnny Robertson. But the main reason was that Jean had a younger sister, Brenda Finch. We were both about eleven, perhaps twelve then, and I don't mind admitting that I had a school boy crush on the very attractive Brenda!

Unfortunately our friendship never blossomed so I never got the chance to sing these two lines from the chorus of Auld lang syne :- And there's a hand, my trusty Fiere!

And gie's a hand o'thine!

Nostalgia and Happy days! So Michael J Fox, as the song says "Thanks for the memories."