

Going to the Shops – Selsdon in the 40s and 50s.

(All photos taken Nov 2018)

The green fields of Selsdon Farm were transformed into an extensive housing estate during the mid 1920s to the late 1930s. My parents bought a new semi-detached house in Abbey Rd in about 1935 which then cost £695. The ongoing house building ceased as a result of World War II.

As one would expect, there was also a planned development of a “high street” of shops. This of course was along the Addington Road. However this plan was also upset by the war, with not much more than about two thirds of the shops being completed and trading during most of the 1940s.

The whole block shown below had the flats above completed, but all 9 shop units at ground level were empty and boarded up until sometime after the war ended.



At the other end of the shopping centre, starting at Selsdon Garage, there were three shops; a wool shop, Tudor Library which is still there, and lastly, Monty’s a baker’s shop.

I hope that the two photos below will help to illustrate the changes, pre and post war. You can see in the left hand photo that there is a “newly” built block of shops and flats up as far as the drive-through entrance. Originally this was only a single storey row of open but empty shop units. There were no flats over them, these were a circa 1970s add on. To better illustrate the halfway stage between what I was seeing during the war in the 1940s, and what you will see today, is this photograph at

https://www.francisfrith.com/selsdon/selsdon-addington-road-c1965_s613041 . This shows the new post war shops, but before the flats were built on top of them much later.

In the right hand photo below, starting from over the drive-through entrance, again there were 3 or 4 empty shop units, but these did have flats over.

The differences in design and construction materials of these flats provide a clear indication of the different phases of development, pre and post war. I should also add that the present day shops are not those first occupied the shop units. The many different occupiers over the years would need a whole chapter to record!



New shops with added flats over (at left)

Pre-war flats with new shops below

Finally, from today's Iceland to Barclays Bank, where there is a now a block containing some six different shops, was in my young days just an open area of waste land with an Air Raid Wardens post on it. So in total, over 20 less shops than now.

Today we are used to supermarkets. The nearest that Selsdon had to one in the 1940s, was the South Suburban Cooperative Society shops. I say shops because there were two, next to each other. A grocery shop and a butcher's. These were in the premises now occupied by Nationwide (the butchers), and the pub, Sir Julian Huxley, which provided a large, double fronted grocery shop. The old shop on the corner was an off-licence.



Shopping choice was further restricted by rationing regulations. You were required to nominate the shops at which you would use your ration coupons, when purchasing many goods. So you would have to nominate a butchers for meat products, a grocery shop for tinned fruit/ meat, dried items such as prunes, peas, legumes, etc. My Mum nominated the Coop for both meat and groceries, but our next door neighbour for example, used Ockleford's a local butcher who had his own pig farm in Ashen Vale, and Cave Austin's for groceries.

Some other important staples were not rationed, but subject to regular supply shortages. These included bread products (Monty's Bakery), fresh and hence seasonal fruit and veg (Nash's and Cowley Nurseries), fresh fish and fish and chips. I cannot remember the original owner of the fish shop, but later it was Sands or Sandy's whose son I knew at Selsdon Primary. There was a good range of shops in Selsdon, virtually everything that was normally needed, only lacking a candlestick maker! It also helped that most of the shop owners lived in Selsdon. No doubt this also helped, as was rumoured, in a little bit of black market dealings with favoured customers!

Food rationing covered a very wide range of products, too many to detail here, but one last item to mention is milk; 3 pints a week for adults and children under 5, and 3.5 pints for children under 18. Additionally, each consumer (i.e. both children and adults) could get one tin of "Home Semi-skimmed Dried Milk" every 8 weeks. This was equivalent to 8 pints of milk. (Children pre-school age got full cream milk from the Children's Welfare Centre at the Baptist Church Hall). I mention milk because something that you do not now see today, in the high street, is a milk shop. There were two in Selsdon!



Kiba was originally the United Dairies shop.
Red was their signage colour

Kebab shop behind bus shelter was
originally the blue, Express Dairy shop

You may wonder why there were two dairy shops in Selsdon when the milk was delivered to our front doors, by the local milkman on his horse drawn milk float. I still wonder! I did go with my Mum to these dairy shops on a few rare occasions, but to buy what I have no idea! My best guess would be to buy cheese. Before the war 70% of cheese was imported, this supply was virtually cut off during the war. So being in very short supply a "Government Cheddar Cheese" was introduced, presumably a mixture of whatever was available at any time. But not very often available for us to eat!

Shopping was virtually a daily chore. As was the queuing when you got to each shop for the meagre rations that you were allowed to buy – if they had it in stock! This resulted in a helpful neighbour system. In those days, long before the internet and social media, messages were by word of mouth. A neighbour knocking the door to say, “They’ve got sausages at Ockleford’s, get down there quick!” And off you went, immediately. Even then, often when you got to the shop it had sold out.

Finally to end this introduction to war time shopping, the poor old mums had to carry all the heavy shopping home in baskets or shopping bags, one in each hand! And I can assure you, a basket full of muddy potatoes weighs a ton – or so it seemed on the long walk home.

After the war finished, plus a couple or more years when petrol rationing finished, a business was started by an entrepreneur in Thornton Heath. He or they, bought a couple of war surplus army lorries and went around knocking on doors. This new business was called “The Direct Potato Supply Company”. A half hundred weight bag of potatoes delivered to your door once a fortnight. It went down a bomb!