

Selsdon's Green Fields - Mid 1940s

(All photos taken Nov 2018)

It was interesting to read young Cameron Sharp's item in the October Gazette, about the Goschen family and their local land holdings. Cameron makes mention of the disposal of Ballards Estate, a large part of which was sold for housing.

As a young boy growing up in Abbey Rd, Selsdon, I remember the green fields of Ballard's Farm alongside Selsdon Park Rd, where herds of cows grazed. I also used to see their horse drawn milk floats making deliveries of milk from Ballard's Farm Dairy.

After the war finished these fields soon disappeared to be replaced by prefabs in what was to become Monks Hill Estate. Monks Hill Estate was a much needed housing development for Croydon Council, to replace the housing stock destroyed during the war. Monks Hill being in Addington, was in the Borough of Croydon, whereas Selsdon was then part of Purley and Coulsdon District Council and in the County of Surrey, and thus not then a part of Greater London.

Something that perhaps few will know is that when ground works began at Monks Hill, the main labour force was prisoners of war. Of course it made good sense to use this labour force (idle hands etc) as they had to be fed, housed and paid by the tax payer even if they did nothing (Geneva Convention.)

On the other side of the main road, where Selsdon Park Rd becomes the Addington Rd, and on the corner of the road named Ashen Vale, is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints. At that time, mid 1940s and for many years after, this site was a very smelly pig farm, alongside which a lovely wooded foot path led down to the Bird Sanctuary, as I knew it, or Selsdon Wood at it is now more commonly known. This path still exists, being part of the long distance London Loop path. However, being now sandwiched between two large housing estates (Forest Dale and Ashen Vale) it has lost its original rustic ambience.



Just to the right of where this path enters the Bird Sanctuary, and backing on to it, was another pig farm on what is now Quail Gardens. This one (and possibly the other one) was owned by Mr Ockleford who had a butchers shop in Selsdon. This shop, on the Addington Rd, was probably where the Santander Bank or Costa Coffee now are.



Next to Ockleford's pig farm were kennels where Shetland sheep dogs were bred. Due to war time and post war rationing I assume that these lucky dogs got bones and meat scraps from the pig farm/butchers shop. Probably more tasty than Ockleford's sausages, which like all "sawdust flavoured", war time sausages were made mainly of bread!

I moved away from Selsdon to Dover in 1963, and looking at a road map of this area as it is now, it is unrecognisable to how I knew it. The housing estates of Ashen Vale and Forest Dale did not then exist. These two large areas consisted of fields, woods and a few small holdings (for example the pig farms and dog kennels) dating back to post W.W.I. And there was also an overgrown plot of land alongside the northern boundary of the Bird Sanctuary, with a long abandoned outdoor swimming pool. I was told that in pre-war days this was a nudist camp - for naturists, not naturalists!

Ashen Vale was then an unmade road, little more than a cart track. It continued from the Addington Rd all the way to Old Farleigh Rd, joining it with what is now Sandpiper Rd, where (below) the car is shown exiting.

It was of interest to me, that when I used to go along Ashen Vale, I never once saw a car. When I took this photo I had to wait for a couple of minutes because the constant traffic in and out of Sandpiper and up and down Old Farleigh kept obscuring to picture that I was trying to take!



The fields and small holdings of Ashen Vale stretched from the London Loop pathway to Old Farleigh Rd, and from the Bird Sanctuary up to Greville Ave. As a youngster, the fields backing on to Greville Ave and Selsdon Recreation Ground were a popular playground for me and my friends. We built camps hidden in the undergrowth of the field boundaries, where we cooked dough boys on camp fires, and in the autumn, roasted chestnuts. What an idyllic world it was then. Now, sadly, it is all bricks and mortar – and cars!

One more thing that I was reminded of whilst waiting for my photo. One hundred yards further down Old Farleigh Rd, at its lowest point, there was a tank trap. An invasion by the Germans was a very real possibility early on in the war. One of many defensive measures was the installation of tank traps. I know of 3, probably 4, in the main routes through Selsdon.

So what was a tank trap? A very simple construction to stop, or at least impede, an enemy advance. Two or three, square pits (depending on road width) were dug in the road. Then 3 or 4 foot cubes of concrete were lowered into the pits. The cubes had recessed iron ring handles, which in time of need, allowed the cubes to be lifted out of the pit and used to block the road. Advancing vehicles could not go around because of the deep pits. Of course they would not work now because of the easy availability of bull dozers, cranes, etc. But this was when hydraulic power was in its infancy and such equipment was not so easy to obtain.