

Addiscombe

Some personal names have been redacted for privacy reasons.

Addiscombe was a suburb of Croydon. When we lived there it was emphatically not London. Croydon was not London. London started at Brixton. We lived in Surrey, ok not posh Surrey, like Purley or Reigate but Surrey nonetheless. Although we knew our immediate neighbours, at no time in my childhood was there any sense of a neighbourhood or a community. This may have been partly because mum was never a 'joiner', or very gregarious but it was also the way things were (or weren't) in that place at that time. You only ever spoke to people that you knew. You certainly would never say hello to someone just because you passed them in the street, or stood behind them at the bus stop every day. This was improbable anyway as buses were very frequent, so you would be unlikely to encounter the same people on a regular basis.

Our neighbours at 28 Sundridge Road on the left as you faced the house, were Mr and Mrs ----- (----- and ----- but I wouldn't have called them that). They were probably in their late forties or early fifties when I remember them. Mr ----- always had a very red face and I think wasn't in the best of health. Mrs ----- was a matronly sort, with iron grey hair. They had two sons, -----, who was about five years older than me and ----- who was adopted. ----- was older still, 'grown up', he was quite studious and wore glasses. I used play with ----- in the garden. He was very keen on Bayko, a pre-Lego construction set that involved lethal iron rods. No one would sanction this as a child's toy now but we just learned to be careful. I had and still have, Bayko of my own for my fifth birthday and I inherited -----'s when he got too old for it. I can remember the kitchen in their house. There always seemed to be dripping solidifying in a pan on the side, waiting to be reheated and melted for the next use. I always thought this

was very odd; maybe they had no fridge. After we left Addiscombe the ---
--s moved to Worthing. My boyfriend and I went to stay there when I was
sixteen, so we could go away together but still be semi-supervised.

On the other side were the -----, ----- and -----, known to me as 'Mrs
(Christian name)' as a sort of compromise between Mrs (surname) and an
honorary 'Auntie'. There was no equivalent 'Mr (Christian name)'; I think
he was just Mr (Surname). They had two children, ----- and -----, who
were about three and six years younger than I was. Strangely, the only
part of their house that I remember was the landing, that and the strong
smell of washing powder. On one occasion ----- smeared himself with red
toothpaste and caused quite a stir coming out of the bathroom as his
mother thought he was covered in blood! Maybe that was why I
remember the landing. A piece of fence was lowered at the bottom of the
back garden so that ----- and I could chat. I can remember sharing
Smith's crisps with him (only one flavour in those days). I inadvertently
ate the little blue salt bag, that accompanied the crisps in those days;
these bags were later revived as a gimmick known as 'Salt and Shake'. I
don't remember having any other immediate neighbours while we lived in
this house, maybe the -----'s and the -----'s stays in Sundridge Road
pre-dated ours. They were certainly still there when we left. The -----
later moved up the property ladder to a large house in Beckenham and
we saw them occasionally. My mother remained in life-long contact with
these families. The only other neighbour I can remember from Sundridge
Road was Mrs -----, an elderly lady who I think lived next door but one to
the ----- . She clearly had what we now know as Alzheimer's and used
appear at various hours of the day and night asking for her hot water
bottle to be filled.

We had milk delivered by the orange and white, electric Unigate Dairy milk float. I think they also delivered other dairy products. Milk came in glass bottles with foil tops. Birds would often peck holes in the foil, particularly if you had the creamiest milk. The Corona Man did come with bottles of fizzy drink but we didn't buy these.



Harris and Bailey 1959

Resourceful children would collect the Corona bottles and get the deposit money back on them. Coal was also delivered to the door, in a horse drawn cart, by the firm Harris and Bailey, which I always thought was Harrison Bailey. The ice cream man might drive past in the summer with his distinctive chimes ringing out. The rag and bone man particularly sticks in my memory. He too had a horse drawn cart and would shout out 'rag 'n' bone' for us to take out anything for recycling - not that that was a term in use then.

We shopped in Lower Addiscombe Road, which was adequate for everyday needs, with a variety of shops. On the left-hand corner as you left Sundridge Road was Unigate Dairies. On the right, not the first shop but the first that I remember, was the newsagents where I went to collect my *Diana* comic; I was much more interested in comics than sweets. Most of the shops were on the left as you turned out of Sundridge Road and on our side of the main road. There was Woolworths. The counter on the left-hand side as you went in, past the 'Pick and Mix' sweets and the records was where the tiny plastic Disney figures were sold. I was particularly keen on collecting the 101 dalmations, although there were other Disney characters too. There weren't actually 101 different dalmations but there were a good many in various poses, some with accessories, like a bone or

a bowl, some with white ears and some with black. They all had names. I still have these and could probably still name most of them. A standard figure was 9d¹ but you could also buy sets that were dearer. I suppose these were the forerunner of my daughters' 'Puppies in my Pocket'. Putt's toyshop was also on the Lower Addiscombe Road.

Sainsbury's in those days was what we would now call a delicatessen, selling cold meats and cheese, with shelves containing a very sparse array of tins of things like spam and tongue. I never liked Sainsbury's, mainly I think because it was tiled and shady. Irrationally, I still don't like Sainsbury's, so it must have made quite an adverse impression. Under the railway bridge, which has now been demolished, was the tobacconist's. This wasn't actually a shop that you could go in, just a counter selling cigarettes and pipes. Freeman Hardy and Willis, managed by Mr -----, the father of my school friend, was near here. I think this was the shop that had the flying cylinders on high wires that sent your money to the cashier's office and then returned your change - fascinating. I think there was a butcher's. In those days all butcher's had sawdust on the floor and there was a very distinctive smell, some would have carcasses hung up outside. At the very end of the road was The Black Horse pub but I didn't go in there until I was much older. I remember being taken shopping in my pram, I was probably just over a year old, mum bought a Hovis loaf and put it in the bottom of the pram. By the time we got home I had eaten the crust off all round the loaf, leaving the middle behind.

My school, Tenterden School, was in Teevan Road and the site has now been built on as Tenterden Close. To walk there I had to go up Sundridge Road turn left, walk along Lower Addiscombe Road, cross Everton Road and then turn left again by the Post Office. I can't remember if I ever

¹ Nine old pence, the equivalent 3½-4p.

walked to this school without an adult; even though I left there when I was only seven, I probably did.

When we went to visit my maternal grandparents in Davidson Road, a walk of just over a mile, you had to turn right out of Sundridge Road and go along the Lower Addiscombe Road towards Croydon, before turning right again. In this direction was Addiscombe Station, the Alma Tavern and the large ToCH building, which I was to enter later in life. Bingham Road Station was nearer to home. Bingham Road formed a cross roads with Sundridge Road and Lower Addiscombe Road. You could hear the trains going past from home. In order to encourage me on the walk home from granny's, mum used to play 'horses', so we would gallop for some of the way. She also made the journey seem to go by more quickly by watching our shadows come from behind us to in front of us, getting larger and smaller as we passed the lamp posts. I can only ever remember doing this walk in the dark and I have no recollections of the outward journey, only going home.

There were occasions when we had to transport budgerigars from granny's to home. We may only have actually done this once but it seems as if it was several times. Nor can I be sure why we were doing this, as we holidayed together. Initially, granny had two budgies, Comfy and Cosy, one blue and one green. To this, was added the plain yellow Romeo, so called I think, because he had been found 'roaming'. We seemed to make a habit of catching lost budgies and I was to continue this trend. I had my own budgie Pixie, who was later to share a cage with Romeo, who outlived granny. The bird cage was put on my, by then outgrown, pushchair and covered with a blanket. I stood on the push chair step and leant forward holding the handle to stop the cage sliding off in the event of any emergency stops.

The nearest church was St. Mildred's in Bingham Road. It was a twentieth

century construction, designed to cope with the eastward spread of Addiscombe. My parents were not church-goers but I went to Sunday School at St. Mildred's for a while. I remember that we were called up on to the stage when it was our birthdays. I always went up with a school friend, -----, whose birthday was the same week as mine. Annoyingly, there was always another girl as well. Although I didn't know her at the time, she later became a close friend when we went to the same secondary school. We went to Dr -----, father of a school friend, ---, when we lived in Addiscombe but I can't remember where exactly the surgery was. I was quite healthy so probably didn't go much. In any case, doctors tended to do home visits at this time.

There were two parks, the little rec² in Bingham Road and the larger Ashburton Park at the end of Lower Addiscombe Road, where the library was. Parks used to have metal signs by the gates to tell you when they shut. Different times would be slotted in throughout the year, as closing time was usually dusk. We normally went to the little rec; I never went here unaccompanied. You entered the rec through the gate and went up a long path before it opened out into a large piece of grass with flower beds and I think tennis courts. The path continued all round the perimeter of the park. On one occasion, two children were racing their bikes round the circumference and met each other just as they got to the path to the entrance gate. This coincided with our arrival up that path and we had just let Sparky off her lead. She was still a puppy and was scared by the bikes. She turned tail and ran home across the main road. It was an anguishing time for mum until we knew that she was safe.

The big rec (Ashburton Park) was where the May Fair was held. There would be maypole dancing and if you were very lucky and very quick, you might manage to grab one of the streamers in order to have a turn.

²Rec' was an abbreviation for recreation ground.

Further away and much larger was Lloyd's Park, with its hills, ideal for rolling down. There was also a slide set into the hill, which I quite liked as I was never a fan of heights and it meant that you could get a decent slide without climbing up anything.

Then there was Shirley Hills, a wonderful place, 'country' as far as I was concerned. Most of it was stony, in fact I called it 'stony hills' for a time, with patches of woodland and heather. One route to Shirley Hills took us past some gardens, open to



Shirley Hills

the public, with a café and a stables, that sometimes had horses in. Once on Shirley Hills there was a 1930s' tea room with a kiosk to buy wonderful, slightly fizzy, lemon chews for 1d, that had orange and purple wrappers. Alternatively, we might get a Mivvi or a Split lolly. These were expensive lollies, with ice cream in the middle. Splits were made by Walls and Mivvis by Lyon's Maid, really the only ice cream suppliers at the time. These cost from 8d to 11d when I was growing up. A cheaper option (6d) was a rocket shaped Zoom, that had several different coloured stripes; as you sucked the top, the next coloured layer was revealed; the blue layer stained your lips blue. Adults had choc-ices. We sometimes went to Crystal Palace where there was a wonderful park full of huge dinosaur models. I later worked at the sports centre there.