

Shirley

Some personal names have been redacted for privacy reasons.

Moving to Shirley, in 1963, was coming up in the world compared to Addiscombe and by the time we were at 3 Parkfields, in 1969, we were virtually in Kent!

Our neighbours in Firsby Avenue on the right as you faced the house were the -----s. Mrs ---- had I think five grown up children when we moved in. The youngest, -----, babysat for me a couple of times. They had a cat and acquired a black Labrador puppy called Prince.

Shortly after we moved in, the ----- family moved in on the other side. --

--- and ----- with two daughters ----- and ----- . The younger daughter was eighteen months older than me and we were best friends until her family emigrated in 1969. Mr and Mrs ----- were quite old fashioned so, given a choice, we played at my house, although I did stay the night there a few times. On the far side of the ----- were the ----- family who had three boys, ranging from a year older to two years younger than me.



**My Trike with Sparky as a Puppy 1962
when still at Sundridge Road**

Our road ran parallel to the main Wickham Road. Four roads linked Wickham Road to ours. Wickham Avenue, directly opposite our house, Orchard Avenue to the left and Ridgemount Avenue and finally Verdayne

Avenue to the right. This gave plenty of choices of 'block' to ride round on my large trike, which I reluctantly traded for a two-wheeler bike when I was nine. I fell off my bike once, on the opposite side of Firsby Avenue, heading towards Orchard Avenue and was taken in by the people who lived nearby.

It wasn't the sort of area where groups of children played in the street (only common people did this). I was always instructed not to play near water. This did not appear to have anything to do with the possibility of drowning, rather because I might contract polio, even though I had received polio sugars. I didn't play outside with a group of children. I might, with one other person, go for a walk with our dolls' prams, ride my bike or take the dog for a walk. I did range quite a long way on these expeditions and from the age of about eight would be unsupervised. We might go down the Glade past the Big Yellow Golf Ball (a putting range that is still there) to Elmers End, two and a half miles away. Elmers End was where Muirhead's Paint Factory used to be until it burnt down. The smell and clouds of black smoke penetrated for miles. I have written that with absolute certainty, yet on checking Google for the date, Muirhead's was an aerospace company and it was Bollom's that was the paint factory. As to the date of the fire, beyond the 1960s, no one seems sure.

We also went down Woodmere Avenue, past St. George's Church, where I went to Guides, to another park. Across Orchard Avenue was Parkfields, our regular dog walking park in Shirley, even before we lived opposite. We usually called this 'Muddy Park', because it was. To get to it from Firsby Avenue, you went past an archetypal 1930's house with rounded bay windows and a flat roof that fascinated me. Near the Orchard Rise entrance was a garden where chickens were kept. This park had play equipment a slide, a horse, swings and a strange spaceship-like climbing frame. It also had a roundabout, one of the solid sort I think. Other parks had large roundabouts like conical hats on poles that you stood on - scary

- and roundabouts that were just bars. I was never particularly energetic so probably didn't get the full benefit of this equipment. Football matches were played on Parkfields at the weekends. As a teenager, I would linger round the touchlines in the hope of catching the eye of a footballer, to no avail. Miller's Ponds, actually a park with water in, was on my way home from school if I went a slightly longer way round. I sometimes stopped off there briefly but it was the wrong side of the main road for regular play and I had to avoid the water because of the polio! Friends suggest that there was much more of a community on that side of the Wickham Road but that may be down to personalities rather than geography.

Woodland Way was a small piece of wooded land that backed on to Firsby Avenue and was accessed either via Orchard Avenue, or down an alleyway further up our road. On one 'adventure' ----- and I retrieved a torn-up letter from the other side of a high chain linked fence in Woodland Way. All I can remember now was the address, which I believe was 8 Overstrand.¹ I know that the contents seemed scandalous but I can't quite remember what they were. Another Blytonesque moment was when we found ourselves on a piece of wasteland between Ridgemount and Verdayne Avenues. There was a large shed crammed full of packets of cigarettes!

The Wickham Road shops did not have the scope of those in Addiscombe. There was a 'Supermarket' on our side of the main road, a new invention at the time. It was most memorable for its Green Shield Stamps. Petrol stations also gave these as loyalty rewards and they could be redeemed for gifts. Two things stick in my mind from shopping expeditions with Mum and both became habits of a lifetime. Hence, I never approach a checkout without having a rough idea of what the total cost of my trolley is likely to be and I always open egg boxes to check that none are broken.

¹ On checking I find that Overstrand Close is a road in Beckenham.

Also between Orchard Avenue and Wickham Avenue was I think an estate agent's and on the corner the Tudor House Restaurant. Mum went there a couple of times a year. On the opposite corner was the Esso Garage. I remember in the early sixties that petrol was 5/11 a gallon and you got a free tiger's tail because their slogan was 'put a tiger in your tank'. Mods used to tie the tails to their scooters. My friend ----- and I used to play a game where we tried to spot car number plates in numerical order starting at 1. 777 could be used as a wild card. There was a 777 number plate in the window of this garage and I tried to count it on my way home from school each day. I made good progress this way. ----- claimed that this wasn't fair and she was probably right!

Between Wickham Avenue and Ridgemount Avenue was a dusty old shop that didn't really seem to sell anything much. We went in there to swap tea cards, which you could do without having to buy anything. Near here was Musgrove's sweet shop where we could buy sherbert lemons, flying saucers, black jacks, fruit salad chews² or liquorish shoe laces. Outside was the phone box. I regret that this was used to make nuisance calls, at 3d a time, both to people we did and didn't know. There was a list of exchanges on the wall, for some reason I was always drawn to Micheldever. Here too was the bus stop that I could use to go to school. I never bussed in the morning but did sometimes go back to school on the bus after lunch. The fare was 2d and you got a purple printed ticket from the conductor. If he had just re-inked his machine you ended up with purple ink all over your hands. Beyond Verdayne Avenue was Fred Dawe's the newsagents and Blennerhasset's the haberdashers. The latter was often a source for Christmas presents for mum.

The shops that I remember on the far side of the Wickham Road include

²Black jacks and Fruit salad were ½d each.

John Menzies, another newsagents who delivered our papers. Lovibonds off licence, run by the ----- family, the pet shop where I briefly had a job and the travel agent, handy for buying bus Rover Tickets. Further down, near the Shirley Inn, was the dentists, run by a husband and wife team, Mr and Mrs ----- who had been Hungarian, Jewish refugees³ during the war. At the Addiscombe end of Wickham Road, on this far side, was the Crown Inn. Mum went here occasionally with friends, the -----s or the -----s and I remember playing in the garden. It was an exciting garden, with a long pergola and a pond. It was later our teenaged pub of choice.

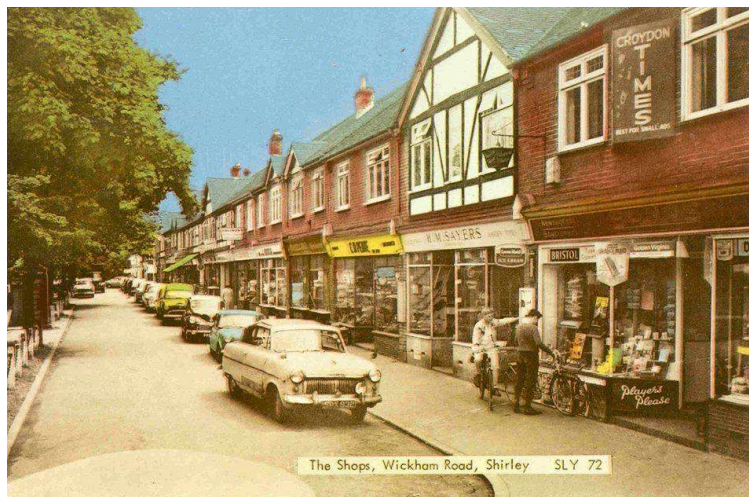
The Doctor's surgery and the Library were on the corner of Wickham Road and Hartland Way. The doctor was Doctor ----- and I believe he lived across the road from the surgery in Orchard Way. I went to the library, a single-story Art Déco style building, every now and again but normally relied on my own book collection. I recall borrowing and reading, huge biographies of Mozart and Beethoven when I was about seven, I have no idea why and also getting out books for school projects. I can remember when the traffic lights were put in on this cross roads, together with the 'little green man' for pedestrians to activate. At the top of Orchard Avenue, on a corner, was a large metal box, which I think was connected to the controls of these traffic lights. On one occasion, I was walking to get a bus to the swimming baths when I walked smack into this box. That was the end of my plans to go swimming that day.

Another 'neighbourhood' memory is of a hedge outside a house near the top of Wickham Avenue on the left hand side as we walked up. This consisted of a shrub with holly shaped leaves and blueish berries. When you squashed the berries they exuded purple juice, so on each journey to and from school a few more just had to be squashed. I can also

³I don't remember their origins, if indeed I ever knew. This information was supplied by former primary school colleagues.

remember the road being resurfaced on my route to school, probably in West Way. I still find the smell of wet tar evocative. For some reason I associate that day with postcodes having just been issued. Apart from the London boroughs, these were then a new thing. They were rolled out over a period of time but Croydon postcodes were issued on 1st May 1967, so it must have been my last term at primary school. There were several possible routes between home and school, best part of a mile away. One involved a series of muddy alley ways, which made the journey seem more exciting.

The move to the far eastern edges of Shirley left us with even less of a neighbourhood feel. We were the bottom left hand corner of our block of four maisonettes, as you faced them. I don't think I ever knew who lived diagonally opposite but next door was Miss ---



Wickham Road Shops

---- an archetypal, newly retired spinster. Her sister ----- had owned our maisonette before moving to the Barbican, making room for us in Parkfields. Above us were the unmarried ----- sisters. My main memory of them was when they telephoned to complain about the noise I was making. I crept round the house for a couple of hours wondering what on earth they could have heard, when they rang back to apologise, having discovered that the source of the problem was the wind whistling through their secondary double glazing. We were further from the Shirley shops here. There was a small parade of shops on the opposite side of the main road between us and West Wickham. These were singularly useless, consisting of things like a car parts shop and a bathroom accessories

outlet. West Wickham was just within walking distance but normally we would go by bus. There was a particularly good toy shop in West Wickham but the main reason for a trip to West Wickham was to go swimming.