

## Memories of Croydon

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When we lived in both Addiscombe and Shirley, Croydon was our big town. We hardly ever went to London, less than once a year and then for sightseeing not shopping. As a teenager 'South Ken' (Kensington Market) became trendy and I went a couple of times, apart from that, we stuck to Croydon. From Lower Addiscombe Road, you could get the number 12 bus to Croydon. Walking up to the Upper Road gave you far more choice, including buses coming in from Shirley (the 194s or the 119) and the 130s coming in from Addington. Buses were frequent, there was certainly no need to look at a timetable.

You just went to the bus stop and within ten minutes or so a bus would turn up. They were fewer buses on a Sunday. I can remember walking to Shirley from Addiscombe sometimes on a Sunday when we had visited mum's friends, rather than wait for a bus.



**194b Bus**

I think we went to Croydon perhaps about once a month, maybe less once mum was working in Croydon. Trips to Croydon without an adult probably started when I went to secondary school and was coming home

alone through Croydon by bus anyway. Travelling from home, we would often get off the bus at East Croydon, by the station. Near here was Rickett's the coal merchants and we would pay our coal bill. The station itself was exciting as it heralded a journey. Better still there was a machine where you could pay to get your name (or any other words) embossed on a metal strip.

There were three big department stores. Alder's and Kennard's were opposite each other on the High Street. There was an arcade through Alder's, with a sweet counter. We would often buy Love Hearts here. Also in the arcade was the Readicut



**Kennard's 1960**



**Kennard's Arcade**

wool shop, where mum got wool for her rug-making. By the later 1960s Alder's had a bargain basement, similar to today's pound shops. I bought some records and shoes here and probably got what I paid for. Kennard's arcade was something special. Out the back, in Church Street, you could get donkey or pony rides. These came out by a butcher's who always had a lot of easily identifiable dead animals hanging outside. The arcade was also the site of the most amazing Christmas grottos.

Further down, towards West Croydon Station, was Grants. There were also chain stores, Marks and Spencer, Littlewoods, British Home Stores and C & A. I do remember being embarrassed when I wrote a cheque in British Home Stores and I'd made it out to Littlewoods, or vice versa. In the late 1960s boutiques were appearing on the scene; one called Martin Ford's was inevitably known as 'Fartin' Maud's'. I also remember the coming of the Wimpy Bar (the equivalent of today's MacDonaldis), which we might visit as a treat once a year or so.

Favourite shops included Roffey and Clark's stationers, W H Smith's and Hamley's toy shop. For some years, mum's friend, Joyce, worked in a paperback book shop in George Street, 'Paperback Parade' and I was able to make use of her staff discount. I also loved to walk past the coffee shop in George Street, just for the aroma. Surrey Street market was noisy, smelly and continually littered with cabbage leaves. We didn't go there very often. I did buy a real Christmas tree in the market one year and then took it back home on the bus. It was before the days when Christmas trees were netted and it was over six foot tall!

In 1968, the Whitgift Centre opened. This concept of pedestrianised shopping centres was very new. I



**The Whitgift Centre 1976  
by John Shepherd**

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can only remember shops on the top floor, including The Conran Shop, Bateman's Opticians and a hippy shop called Shape. There was another similar shop smelling strongly of incense and selling tie-dyed items. Down by West Croydon Station, at the end of North End, were the Army and Navy Stores and Reeves furniture store. This end of Croydon was less salubrious and home to the bowling alley and Fox's Records, which was allegedly the local outlet for illegal drugs.

Back towards East Croydon were the Library, Town Hall and Police Station. I very rarely visited the library and never set foot in either of the others. The Fairfield Halls included the Ashcroft Theatre. We visited this for pantomimes and the occasional concert. Opposite was the Greyhound Hotel. In my teenage years I attended pop concerts staged in their basement; seeing bands including Hawkwind and Genesis. I am pretty sure it was a Hawkwind concert when I got crushed in the crowds waiting in the narrow alley by the door. My below waist length hair was several people behind me and was never quite the same again!

The local hospital in Croydon was Mayday. I ended up here when I broke my wrist and ankle in January 1971. Chopper bikes were new at the time and did not yet carry warnings that they were only designed for one person. S\* A\* and I were riding her Chopper bike down Woodland Way, with me on the back. When she lost control, the bike fell sideways with my ankle entangled with the pedal, whilst my wrist was crushed between my body and the kerb. It was primary school coming out time and children were making helpful comments such as, 'You shouldn't have two people on a bike'. S\* was screaming; she had grazed her elbow.



**1971**

Someone looked at me and said, 'She's the one who looks really bad'. An ambulance arrived and I was taken to Mayday. In the ambulance a paramedic said they thought I had sprained my wrist. As I wobbled it round and round I said, 'Don't you think it is broken?'. It was put in an inflatable tube, like a swimming arm band. I was halfway to hospital before I realised that my ankle hurt as well. It turned out that it was crushed. I was told I would never walk properly again and the bones are now fused together but I have no difficulty walking. I was very annoyed because my favourite red, long-sleeved, tee shirt material shirt had to be cut off. I had eaten a boiled sweet so had to wait several hours for a general anaesthetic, so that my bones could be re-broken and reset. I was alone in a room with a clock whose hands clicked forward every 30 seconds and I had nothing to do. It was like Chinese water torture. Mum eventually arrived in a great panic. Apparently, the policeman who had come to tell her about the accident was the same one who had come when my father collapsed at the wheel of his car and died. Her reaction, when the policeman tried to reassure her that there was nothing serious to worry about, was to say, 'You lied to me once before'. I was just cross that she had brought me nothing to read.

I managed, against advice, not to have to stay in hospital overnight but was upset to have missed my first guide meeting for four years. I can't remember how we got home, maybe in an ambulance. In order to avoid having to use a bed pan, I worked out a way of sliding along using two chairs from my bedroom to the toilet. There was finally an advantage to living on the ground floor. I sat on one chair and slid to an adjacent one. Mum then moved the first chair the other side of the second one and I slid along again. Good job it wasn't very far. I remember subsequent ambulance trips to have my plasters changed. On one occasion they put the sirens on so they could get home for lunch more quickly. My wrist was in plaster for six weeks and my ankle for three months. Breaking both wrist and ankle meant I could not use crutches. I did have a wheel chair

but managed to use this as an excuse to have a whole term off school as school was two bus rides away and on several floors.

Once I could swim, when I was ten, I went to the swimming baths with my friends. There were swimming baths in Croydon, with a larger and smaller pool but these were old fashioned and cold. We preferred the new pool at West Wickham. I remember the pervading smell of chlorine and the coloured rubber arm bands to indicate what session you were. When it was crowded, different coloured bands would be called out in turn. There was also the outdoor pool at Purley Way, in Waddon, to which we headed when it got hot enough, which wasn't often. You could spend the whole day here once you were in. Nobody realised that sunbathing was bad for you. There were water chutes into this pool but I wasn't really very keen on these. There was a skating rink in Streatham, regarded as being a bit of a dodgy area. I never got the hang of skating, either roller skating or on ice. I was unable to let go of the edge, except on one occasion when we found some obliging boys to take us round. One end of the rink was roped off for lessons and my choices for getting round this section were either to get off the ice and walk round the outside, or to try to manage to stay upright whilst holding on to the low rope. I never actually fell over on the ice, probably because I never let go. I also went to the cinema. I didn't go to Saturday cinema clubs like some children, maybe there weren't any or maybe they were thought to be for 'common' children. Perhaps I just saw enough films at home. I was a great cinema-goer in my teens. There were cinemas in Croydon, South Croydon and Purley and I went at least a couple of times a month.

As teenagers, the route from Croydon to Shirley was also the scene of our pub crawls. We would start at the Cricketers near East Croydon and walk our way the three miles or so home. Ports of call included the Crown, the Shirley Inn and the Shirley Poppy. There were several others en-route whose names elude me. I do remember weaving across the main

Wickham Road being less than complimentary when one of my friends suggested that my mum might be not be too understanding about my state. Actually, she was very tolerant. She did have worries about drugs but these were unfounded as I was fanatically anti-drugs, unlike many of my associates.