

HISTORY OF THE STEPS TAKEN FOR THE PRESERVATION OF SELSDON WOOD

*I believe was by
Douglas Thomson*

The proposal for preserving Selsdon Wood was started more than thirty-five years ago by the Surrey Garden Village Trust giving five acres towards a scheme having the object of saving as a nature reserve and bird sanctuary 16 acres of Court Wood, the Addington section of the woodlands comprised in the Selsdon Wood Nature Reserve. The response was so encouraging that it was decided to form a purchase committee to endeavour to enlarge the area to be preserved.

This consisted of a group of Croydon residents, acting in conjunction with the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, whose Secretary, Sir Lawrence Chubb, gave active assistance in many ways. The Committee, determined, if possible to save by degrees a total of 200 acres, and in order to prevent the land being sold for building purposes before the purchase money could be raised, Miss A. M. Bonus, Miss W. M. Hudson, Mr. E. A. Earl, Mr. Malcolm G. Sharpe and Sir Lawrence Chubb agreed to enter into a contract to buy it.

* * *

Altogether about £11,000 was found to meet the combined cost of acquisition and fencing, mortgage interest, keeper's wages, etc., the bulk of the money being contributed by thousands of Nature Lovers and ramblers. The Trustees of the London Parochial Charities the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, the Corporation of Croydon and the Coulsdon and Purley Urban District Council contributed substantial sums so that the scheme might be completed.

Selsdon Wood is a fine and unspoiled example of the chalk scrub typical of the nearer Surrey Hills. Coppices of oak and hazel give shelter to myriads of bluebells

and other flowers. Above coppices rise many well grown oak, beech, ash and yew trees, while the woods are criss-crossed by numerous paths.

The desire to preserve for the people a valuable and beautiful tract of woodland was only one of the objects of the purchase scheme. The Committee was extremely anxious to secure Selsdon Wood as a nature reserve and bird sanctuary that would be of outstanding importance to Croydon and London. Elsewhere, it is true, there are small areas where efforts are being made to protect wild life, none though sufficiently large to serve as an open air school where children and students may be brought to study fauna and flora in natural surroundings on a large scale.

* * *

During the nesting and flowering season it is not feasible to allow unrestricted access, but at other times the public are free to roam at will. There are several miles of sheltered footpaths, most of which are always open to the public.

Selsdon Wood has been vested in the National Trust, the national organisation which exists to hold property for the benefit of the whole country. The Trust owns about three hundred places in England and Wales, each of them being of special importance, either for its natural beauty or else for its historic interest. The Selsdon Wood acquisition is one of the largest the National Trust has ever accepted so near to London.

As the Trust is entirely supported by voluntary subscriptions and receives no grant from the State, it would have been unable to accept the Wood without an endowment fund or some other source of income out of which the cost of upkeep could be met. The expense of supervising a nature reserve is obviously heavy,

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owing to the need for employing watchers and caretakers, the burden being liable to be greater near large centres of population, as in the present case. Happily, however, this difficulty was overcome by the generous and public spirited action of the Corporation of Croydon and the Urban District Council of Coulsdon and Purley, who have undertaken jointly to be responsible for the maintenance of the property as an open space and bird sanctuary, and who hold the Wood on a 999 years lease from the National Trust.

The management is in the hands of a Joint Committee consisting of 3 members appointed by the Croydon Council, 3 appointed by the Coulsdon and Purley Council and 3 nominated by the National Trust.

The acquisition of Selsdon Wood means that everyone who cares for the English countryside naturalists especially, have gained a possession that will be of incalculable value, both now and in the future. The purchase has saved for the immediate neighbourhood and for greater London a most beautiful open space; need one express the hope that those who come to the property will do all they can to prevent its spoliation and will co-operate in preserving Selsdon Wood for the delight and recreation of the community?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Site

Principally in the Selsdon neighbourhood of the Urban district but having a part of its area in Croydon on the Addington side of the common boundary of the Urban District with Croydon.

Area

The area of the lands leased under the Agreement with the National Trust is 198.375 acres. Elevation 380 to 520 feet above sea level.

Approaches

The main approach and main entrance is in Old Farleigh Road,

Selsdon, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from its junction with Addington Road at Selsdon Triangle.

There are two other gates in the Old Farleigh Road frontage, one at the northern end, south of Kingswood Way, and one at the southern end giving access across Hillocks Wood. In addition there are three gates on the Croydon side of the Wood, one at the end of Yew Tree Way, one near the end of Court Wood Lane, and the third halfway along The Bridle Way connecting Yew Tree Way and Court Wood Lane.

Wooded Areas

The wooded areas are some 150 acres in extent, and consist of Selsdon Wood, Court Wood (part), Stevens Larch, Greenhill Shaw, Hillocks Wood, Broomwood and The Gorse. The remainder is grassland.

As a point of interest Stevens Larch was cut down during the last war for use as pit-props. It has since been replanted with beech, copper beech, and with "nursing" conifers to provide a certain amount of shelter for the beeches in the younger stages, and help to draw them up.

Special Sanctuaries

In the woodland parts there are three special Bird Sanctuaries, completely fenced in to prevent access by the general public.

Grasslands

There are slightly under 50 acres of grasslands which provide an excellent contrast to the wooded areas. In spite of the use of these fields by the general public a good haycrop is obtained each year by a local nursery man or smallholder, and the income received is set off against the Committee's general expenditure.

Bird Pool

There is a bird pool and fountain in the south part of the wooded area between Broomwood and the Gorse at the junction of the footpaths named Pool Grove and West Gorse. It is fenced in and forms a pleasant feature. The pool was obtained as the result

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U.D. Council in 1952 on the understanding that alternative land would be provided.

Councillor Thornton opposed the suggestion that this fact should be included in a letter to the U.D. Council on the basis that it would confuse the issue.

Other business. The Chairman suggested and the meeting agreed that Mrs. Bartlett should be co-opted as a member of the Council.

Mr. Richardson proposed and Mr. Dossett seconded that the retiring Hon. Sec., Mr. Evans should also be co-opted as a member of the Council and the Executive Committee.

The Chairman concluded by saying that he hoped the U.D. Council would be able to adopt a completely co-operative attitude towards the Selsdon Community Centre, for the Community Association would certainly never stop their efforts to provide the Centre.

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of an offer by Colonel Wood to provide a memorial fountain and bird pool which the Management Committee accepted with a condition imposed by Colonel Wood as to the scattering on the site of the ashes of himself and his wife after cremation.

Drinking Fountains

There are two drinking fountains, one in the field known as David's Crook near the Keepers' Hut in "Pool Grove" and the other near The Yew Tree Way gate. This second drinking fountain was provided as a gift of The Addington Smallholder Ltd., in 1956, and bears a small plate with an inscription to this effect.

Shelter Hut

A new Shelter Hut was erected in 1957. It has a thatched roof and rustic looking external walls of split larch, boarded internally to cover the timber framing. The north-west side of the shelter is open, and along the other three sides fixed seating has been provided. The cost was met from moneys held by the National Trust for the Malcolm Sharpe Memorial Fund.

The shelter bears a small bronze plaque on the inside back wall bearing the following inscription:

THIS SHELTER WAS BUILT
IN 1957 BY
THE NATIONAL TRUST
IN MEMORY OF
MALCOLM SHARPE
1869—1948

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Seats and Litter Baskets

A number of seats and litter baskets have been provided in suitable positions.

Notice Boards

Notice Boards have been provided at the principal entrances, for the display of bye-laws, times of opening and closing, and other notices prohibiting horseriding, shooting, tampering with flowers, etc. The National Trust emblems suitably mounted on posts are also displayed at these entrances.

Boundary Fencing

Originally in 1936 a sum of £1,118 was provided as the sum to be expended on the provision of external fencing and external gates. Since the war the whole of the boundary fencing has been replaced, except along the Old Farleigh Road frontage where the weldmesh type of fencing is in good condition.

The new fencing is of 6 feet high concrete posts with chain link fencing 5ft. high, and two strands of barbed wire above.

MANAGEMENT 1961/62

The Management Committee have met on two occasions during the past year, one of these being their annual visit to the Wood in May.

Two full-time keepers are employed; in addition to normal patrolling they control the number of pests, and during the past year the following have been destroyed:—

Foxes, 43; Grey Squirrels, 101; Jays, 43; Magpies, 37; Crows, 6; Pigeons, 41; Stoats, 2; Weasels, 6; Rabbits, 137.

The Wood is well used by the public, organised bodies and parties of school children in charge of school teachers. Assistance and encouragement is given to organised parties to visit the Wood, and keepers are notified of any such visits.

A Car Park for use by visitors to the Wood is being constructed near the "Greenhill" gate entrance on the Old Farleigh Road frontage.

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