

Saving Selsdon Wood – part 3

This series of articles has been exploring the background of the core group of 5 founders of the 'Selsdon Wood Preservation Society': Mr Lawrence Chubb, Miss AM Bonus, Mr MG Sharpe, Mr EA Earl and Miss WM Hudson.

This month we hear about Mr Sharpe, Mr Earl and a local naturalist, Mr Beadell.

The group's Chairman was **Malcolm Grahame Sharpe (29/03/1868 – (10/04/1948)**. With help from free online census data I have found that he grew up in Norwood and started his career as an Electrical Engineer, by the age of 33 also working as an architect living in South Croydon. Croydon was the location of one of the earliest railways in England, so land values in the area soared as Victorians began to see opportunities to move out from dirty and overcrowded London. Housing development in late 19th century Croydon was booming.

Croham Hurst became a very popular spot for people to visit, however, few people realised that the facility they freely enjoyed was not public property. In 1898 it became known that the Whitgift Governors wished to dispose of the area, the lower slopes were to be developed and the remainder on the top offered to the Council. This proposal would have resulted in half of the Hurst being built upon and the rest being enclosed behind a seven foot high fence. The people of Croydon were outraged and quickly formed a committee to fight the proposals. Malcolm Sharpe was a key player. During February 1899 a memorial signed by a thousand local people was presented to the Council. A letter appeared in one of the papers, *"We are not asking for a new pleasure ground, we only plead that what we have enjoyed for all our lifetime shall not now be taken from us."* (more info on croydon.gov.uk)

Following a successful campaign, on the 8th February 1901 the Whitgift Foundation finally sold the whole of Croham Hurst to Croydon Corporation to ensure protection from development and access for public recreation. A pattern then emerges - Malcolm then successfully fought for the preservation of Purley Beeches (1907). By 1911 he was living in Woldingham and he was on committees to extend (again with success) the protected public access green space in South Hawke, Woldingham & Kenley Common. He then moved to Sanderstead (1 Church Way) and was key to saving Selsdon Wood (1927) and Littleheath Wood (1931). Not only that, this **local hero** also compiled a record of public rights of way, saving them for the future.

He was a member of the RSPB, the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths society and the National Trust. All of these societies would play a key part in the preservation of Selsdon Wood, particularly the recruitment, to the founding group, of Lawrence Wensley Chubb (Secretary of the National Trust).

A more full and fitting tribute to Malcolm can be found on our website from the 1948 Selsdon Gazette. He is described as *'tireless, modest, wise and good'*. I found this photo which may have him in the background - if you can identify him or provide a better image please let us know. (friendsofselsdonwood.co.uk)



Also found on the lease is Mr **Ernest Alfred Earl** (Gentleman). The title denotes his profession which conveyed status, it was not because he was born from the upper classes. According to a census search Ernest was born in Westminster 16/07/1874 where his father's

profession is given as a baker. He somehow had the good fortune (scholarship?) to be trained as a Solicitor at St John's College, Cambridge. Fellow founding member of the Selsdon Wood Preservation group, Winifred Hudson's family also had strong links to that College at that time so he may have known them. His family moved to Croydon (Chatsworth Road) sometime after 1891. The address first appearing on his father's death certificate of 1900. My guess would be that Ernest may have become involved in the saving of Croham Hurst (his legal knowledge no doubt being useful) and became known to Malcolm Sharpe at that time. He owned a Law practice at Chancery Lane London. He is still found on the electoral roll with his Croydon address in 1924 but at some point he moved to Reigate where he died in 1954 aged 80.

In my research into the 5 names on the Selsdon Wood Lease transfer I came across the name **Arthur MF Beadell** (23/02/1872- 24/03/1957) and he is worth mentioning. According to Brian Thomas (writing for The Bourne Society, Book 8 Villlage Histories Chelsham and Farleigh), Arthur was "*an early custodian of our wildlife heritage*", he came from a poor background and had to leave school early but was a talented, self taught and committed naturalist and conservationist and a "*leading light*" in the struggle to save Selsdon Wood and whose advice was regularly sought by Malcolm Sharpe.



Janet Sharp (no relation to Malcolm!)