

A SHORT HISTORY OF RAMSDEN ESTATE ORPINGTON **by Sally Pennington of the Orpington History Organisation.**

In The Book of Orpington author Dorothy Cox says that, "During building operations for The Ramsden Boys School in 1956, remains of an Iron Age farmstead were found. These included corn drying kilns, postholes, storage pits, drainage ditches, a well over 55 feet deep, and pottery on the site dates the farmstead between c50BC – AD50." This is the earliest evidence of habitation on Ramsden.

Ramsden is thought to be the name of an area of land where stock was allowed to forage for food; usually on the edge of a township or village. The field was owned by William Petty who was a fruit grower in the area until 1893. In 1862 an Ordinance Survey map showed some cottages which had been built near the original field. The surrounding area was called Ramsden and by 1920 the cottages were known as Ramsden Cottages. William Petty may have been the builder of Ramsden Cottages. There was also an old house on Chelsfield Lane called Petting Grove, possibly the inspiration for naming Petten Grove and Close. Patten Grove appeared on a map in 1769. A footpath ran from the cottages to All Saints Church originally but it became Ramsden Road in about 1937 and houses began to be built. The road was eventually given a proper hard surface in the 1950s.

Orpington Urban District

Orpington Urban District Council decided to buy land and name it Ramsden in 1952. Older properties were demolished and in 1956 the following roads had a total of 306 houses built on them –

Brow Close	Brow Crescent
Chelsfield Lane	Dyke Drive
Petten Grove	Ramsden Road
Westbrook Drive	Zelah Road

Plans in 1957 also included –

Eldred Drive	Hart Dyke Road
Rye Crescent	Tintagel Road
Quilter Road	Plantation Drive
Petten Close	



Brow Crescent, Orpington, Bromley, c. 1957 Bromley Galleries .. www.ideal-homes.org.uk



Ian Capper Tintagel Road 1950s semis on this section of the road are in contrast to the high density Ramsden Estate further along www.geolocation.ws

188 homes were built in these roads between 1957 and 1961 including flats for the elderly in Quilter Gardens. Between 1960 and 1965 a further 164 houses were built. The flats over the eight shops built on Eldred Drive were completed in May 1961.



Later Box Tree Walk, Ryfield and Ramsden Close were added when Rye crescent was completed between Hart Dyke Road and Petten Grove. Box Tree Walk is said to be named after the Box Tree Inn which once existed in the area.

[Shops in Eldred Drive www.geolocation.ws](http://www.geolocation.ws)
This photo shows the original 8 shops in the foreground, completed in 1961.

Building work came to a standstill between September 1962 and March 1963 as this was one of the coldest recorded. Additional smog, blizzards, snow, snowdrifts and gales were the reason.

London Borough of Bromley



This is the second row of shops built on Eldred Drive. The clinic is in the foreground and the community centre is out of shot on the left.
www.geolocation.ws

Having become part of the London Borough of Bromley in 1965 the OUDC plans were replaced with ones which would see 644 new dwellings being built in Waltham Close, Westwell Close, Wichling Close, Lamberhurst Close and Birchington Close between 1966 and 1979. These dwellings were almost all flats [in 3 tower blocks] and maisonettes. This provided sufficient housing to rehome families as part of the slum and war damage clearance programme for other parts of the borough.

Bromley also expanded the shopping area, built the community & health centres and in 1967 the Church of Unity came into being.

The Church of Unity



A joint Church of England (daughter church of All Saints Orpington) and Methodist Church, built in 1967, on the Ramsden Estate.

There was a thriving community at the church through to the early 2000s when membership started to fall.

Behind the Church of Unity is Ravensbourne Court - one of the blocks which combined single person units with flats and maisonettes.
Photo by [Geography](http://www.geography.com), used subject to [this creative commons usage licence](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

One point of interest is about the part of the estate between Rye Crescent and Quilter Road; when excavations began the builders quickly hit chalk as the area is on the North Downs. A major problem was the discovery of holes and tunnels in the chalk. There was talk that these were linked to the 'Dene Hole' in woods adjacent to Goddington Park and that the tunnels went quite a way out in the North Downs. The solution was to spend many days bringing in lorry-loads of concrete and pouring it down the holes. The flats and maisonettes were built on top of this.



Originally a district heating system was installed for the 'Courts' but it proved to be inefficient and was eventually replaced with separate systems for each dwelling. Then in the mid 1980s the flat roofs on the blocks of maisonettes were replaced with pitched roofs. Further refurbishments were made to homes including double glazing.

Peckham House –
www.geograph.org.uk wikimedia.org

Living on Ramsden

Problems had started to crop up with some tenants soon after the flats and maisonettes were completed. The general feeling picked up from locals at the time was that some tenants who had been rehoused from slum clearance areas in the north of the borough were unhappy with the lack of local facilities and did not like the area. A period of adjustment followed where some tenants were able to move back to the areas they previously lived in and other tenants replaced them. The estate then settled for a while. But in December 1981 six men were shot in an incident at the Community Centre. This led to Ramsden being called 'Little Belfast'. The community centre eventually closed in about 1985 but reopened in Quilter Gardens in 1997.

Schools

Under Orpington Urban District Council Ramsden Infant and Junior Schools opened in 1957, Ramsden Secondary Modern School for Girls in 1958 and Ramsden Secondary School for Boys in 1959. During the excavation for the foundations of the boys' school in 1955 gothic arch style tunnels were discovered. Local historian, Arthur Eldridge, believed they were made by farmers digging chalk to spread on the land. He also said that the shape of the tunnels made them unlikely to collapse. They also built Goddington School a non-residential special school in Avalon Road. To cope with the rising population as a result of the increasing number of homes being built by the London borough of Bromley, Blenheim Infant and Junior Schools opened in 1967.



The Priory School

The original Girls' School building was found to be deteriorating so a programme of rebuilding was begun in 1983. This caused a lot of concerns to families whose daughters attended the school; mainly worries of

disruption to their education. In the same year proposals were made to merge the infants school with the junior schools at both Ramsden and Blenheim. Then in 1988 the Orpington Times carried a report about the proposal to merge the two secondary schools. This merger took place at the beginning of the Autumn term in 1989 when the new Priory School opened. In 1999 Ramsden Infant and Junior schools merged and became Hillside Primary School. Finally, in September 2003, Blenheim Infant and Junior schools became Blenheim Primary school.

The site of Ramsden Boys School eventually had housing built on it and, after some opposition, Bromley Indoor Bowls Centre was built. It was partly funded with money from the National Lottery and opened its doors in 1997.

Bromley Indoor Bowls Centre

Orpington History Organisation website article on the Ramsden Boys School – [Click Here](#)



1992 - Broomleigh Housing Association



In 1992 Broomleigh Housing Association became the landlords for Ramsden tenants and they planned the Ramsden Revival. Since 2002 all the flats and maisonettes bounded by Rye Crescent, Quilter Road and Tintagel Road have been demolished and replaced with modern low-rise flats and houses with gardens and play areas for children.

[Careyswww.careysplc.co.uk](http://www.careysplc.co.uk)



William Petty Way by Ian Capper





William Petty Way New blocks built in around 2006 as part of the refurbishment of the Ramsden Estate.
www.geolocation.ws

[Tintagel Road:..www.geograph.org.uk](http://www.geograph.org.uk)

In early 2013 one of the homes towards the top left was the subject of 'DIY SOS'. It caused some excitement and during the week the team visited Hillside Primary School. The house in question was towards the top end of these houses in Ramsden Road.

Affinity Sutton

In October 2009 Broomleigh became allied with Affinity Sutton who began to provide specific management services. Then in 2011 Broomleigh part of Affinity Sutton Home, part of the Affinity Sutton Group.



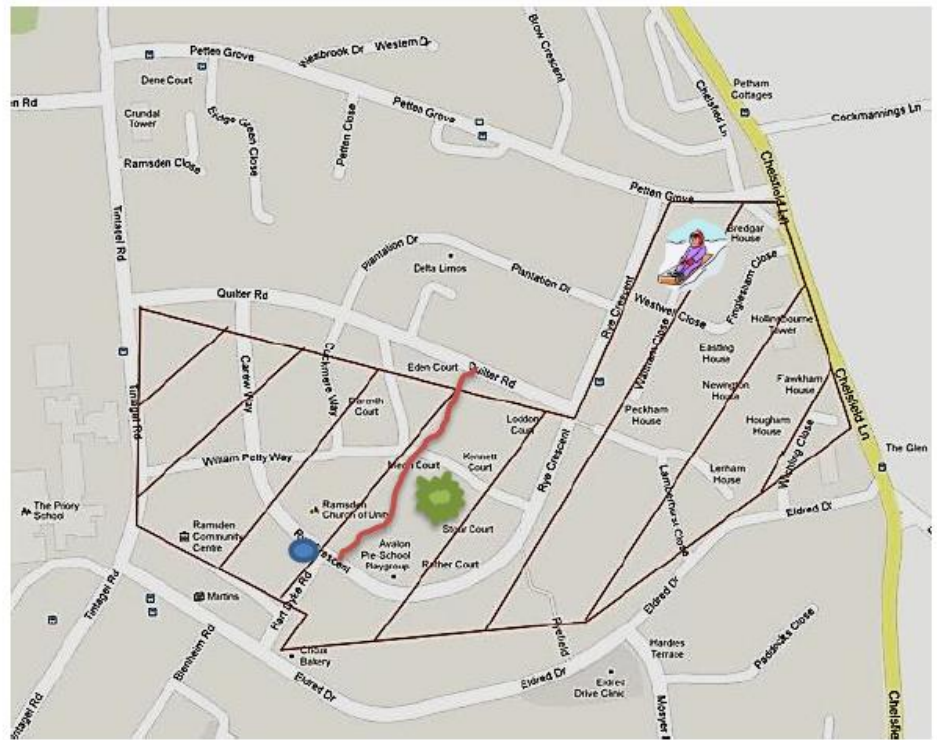
My Memories of Ramsden

My family moved from Chelsfield into 7 Hart Dyke Road on Ramsden when it was completed on 11 April 1961.

The elder of my brothers attended Ramsden Boys School from the age of 11. There is a story about a group of boys at the school building a hovercraft in the 1960s. As a result of this they were invited on one of the first cross channel hovercraft runs. It was supposed to have been filmed for TV but unfortunately the crossing was so rough that the members of the film crew and some of the boys were very seasick so the broadcast never took place!

The centre of Ramsden Estate in the early 1960s

	Footpath worn across the 'field'
	Our House on the corner
	The apple tree
	Tobogganing in winter 62/3



Opposite our house was the area of land which would become the new Ramsden Estate in the second half of the 1960s. It was all rough land extending to Chelsfield Lane. One day my father and uncle had taken my sister and cousin, who were toddlers, for a walk and were seen by my aunt heading back from Chelsfield Lane; she monetarily panicked as she couldn't see my cousin who was happily trotting along through grass way above her head!

My mother told me that when she was a girl the Ramsden area was apple orchards. A rough footpath had appeared where people had cut across from Quilter Road to Hart Dyke Road to get to the shops in Eldred Drive and there was still one lonely apple tree about halfway along it. As children we loved playing on the 'field' and I could climb higher up the tree than most of the boys! I was always in trouble for tearing my clothes!

One day my father took it into his head to teach my mother to ride his moped so all our 'gang' gathered to watch. We stood along the path as she took off at quite a rate but as she shouted over her shoulder to my father, "How do I stop this thing?" we all shot up the apple tree for safety! No harm came to either moped or mother!

There was quite a mound of earth dumped at the top end of the land by Petten Grove and Chelsfield Lane in late 1962 so when the snow came and settled for weeks that winter it provided a great venue for tobogganing.



My brothers joined Boys Brigade and this picture of them in front of our house shows the area behind them where the Church of Unity would eventually be built.

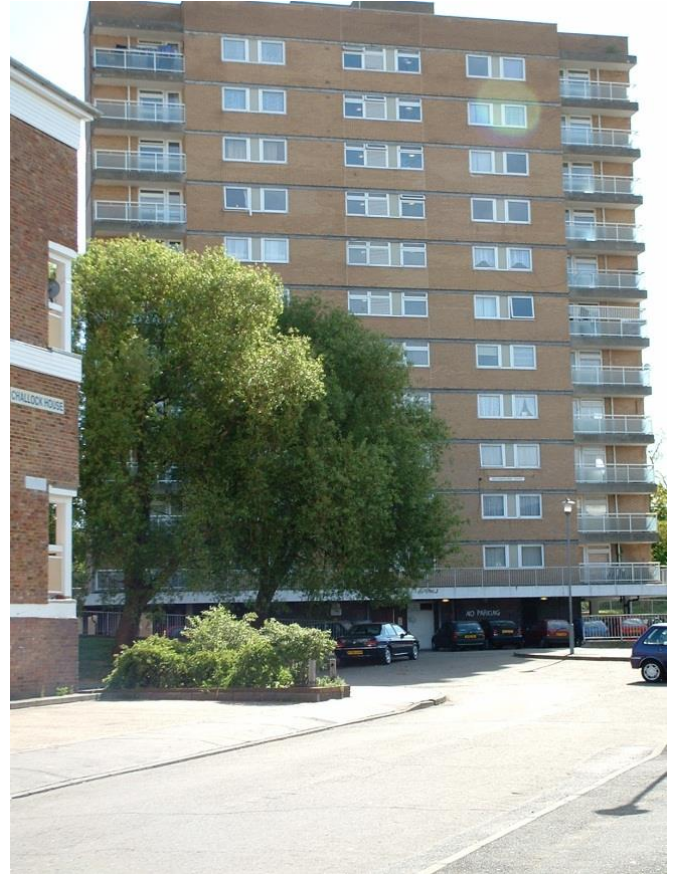
After the move to Ramsden my two brothers and I continued to attend The Highway Primary School until we each moved on to secondary school. It was quite a journey as there were no

buses on the estate at first. The best we could do was to walk to the top of Spur Road and get the 477 to the bottom of the Highway and walk the rest. Most of the time we chose to walk all the way. Eventually a bus service began – the 854. This service ran between Orpington Station and the top of Petten Grove. It was mainly for commuters so there was no service at all on Sundays. Eventually one bus in the morning and one bus in the afternoon were diverted to form a route for schoolchildren – we began to bus!

My mother used the bus to travel to work and discovered a way to cut down waiting time at the bus stop. Someone had to stand in the back garden looking across the field towards Petten Grove where the bus turned round. As soon as it began its manoeuvres Mum left to walk to the stop on the corner of Eldred Drive and Tintagel Road, arriving just before the bus. We all made good use of that one!

I lived away from Ramsden from 1969 until 1986 when my family and I sold our house and moved back in with my father to look after him following the death of my mother. Within 2 or 3 years we had purchased the house jointly with my father under the Right To Buy scheme and had had a large ground floor extension built so my father could have some privacy and did not have to manage the stairs – he was disabled. During that time we found Ramsden to be a reasonable area to live in and one of the local police officers told us that there were far worse places in the borough for crime. I also taught at Hillside Primary School for 9 years. My father died in 2001 and our children gradually left home so, in 2006, after living back on Ramsden for 20 years my husband and I made the decision to move to a smaller place. We did, however, witness the start of the Regeneration of Ramsden. As we still live locally we occasionally drive through Ramsden Estate and see how much better it looks with little roads, rows of houses and areas for children to play.

To round off with readers may be interested in a set of photographs donated by Kevin and an aerial photograph found by Tom Yeeles [OHO].



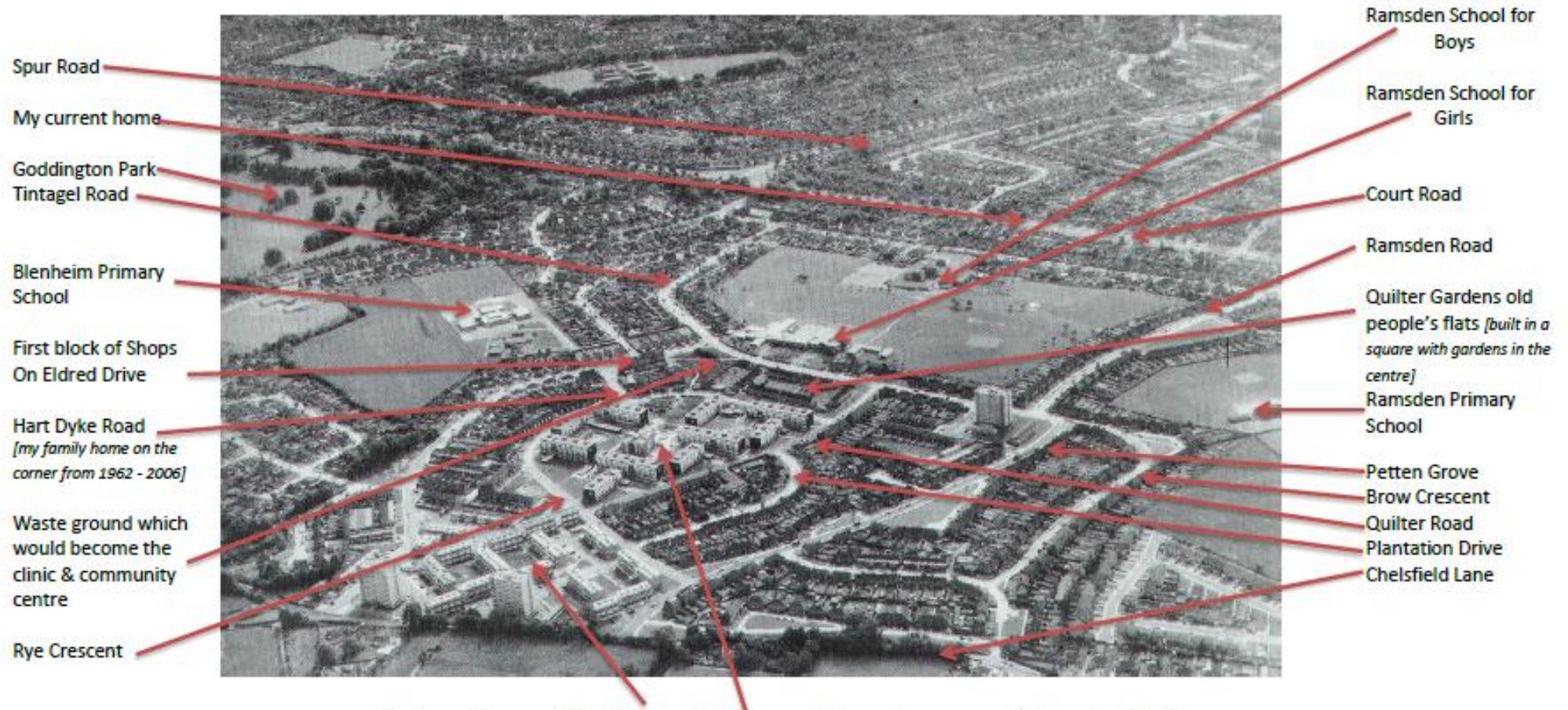






Aerial Photo of Ramsden taken 23/05/72

*Found in 'West Kent from the Air' by John Guy, published by Meresborough Book in 1987
Originally from Cambridge University collection*



The two phases of building which formed the main areas of Ramsden Estate

Bibliography

<i>The Book of Orpington.</i>	Dorothy Cox.	Baron Birch 1983
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<i>Ramsden Estate.</i>	Pauline Greenstreet	1970
<i>Ramsden's Revival revs up.</i>	Broomleigh Housing Association	2002
<i>Affinity Sutton</i>	Website	