

## Gheluvelt Avenue

Gheluvelt Avenue was built in the 1920s as municipal housing under the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919.

It had been planned to build houses there some years earlier but the First World War intervened and the scheme to build municipal (i.e. council built) housing was diverted to the Worcester Road in order to provide housing for convalescent servicemen.

Up until 1980, all of the houses in Gheluvelt Avenue were council houses but under the Right to Buy Act, brought in by Margaret Thatcher's Government, many are now under private ownership.

Gheluvelt Avenue, as a lot of people probably know, was named after a village in Belgium west of Polygon Wood, where, on 31 October 1914, following retreat from the First Battle of Ypres, in the face of ferocious German onslaught, the Second Worcestershires fought one of the most remarkable battles in its long and distinguished history. They were roused early by the crash of gunfire. They were almost the last available reserve of the British defence. To an onlooker, they would not have seemed very formidable. The battalion could only muster 454 men after 10 days of battle. They were soaked in mud and torn by brambles, but their weapons were clean and in good order. Elsewhere, others of the British army were in a very serious situation. It was decided that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Worcestershires should counter-attack. At 12.15 pm A company took up position on a railway embankment and held it for two hours firing rapidly at the enemy. At 1 pm orders were received to regain the lost positions around Gheluvelt. Bayonets were fixed at 2 pm, the battalion led by Major Hankey, and down to 357 men, moved off under cover of Polygon Wood. From their position on a ridge, the Chateau of Gheluvelt was hidden; the open ground in front of them was littered with stragglers and wounded men. In every direction German shells were bursting. Major Hankey decided the only way forward was to move in one great rush. As they reached the crest of the ridge, they were seen by the enemy and shells burst all around them, showering them with shrapnel. More than 100 were killed or wounded, but the rest pressed on at speed downslope. The enemy were hunted out of hedges and across open fields. Houses were burning and walls collapsed. Although the village remained in enemy hands, the bravery of the remnants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Worcestershire's help to drive back the main German force and avert the peril of a collapse of the British defence along the Menin Road.

Gheluvelt Avenue is not the only place to derive its name from this little known battle. There is a Gheluvelt Park in Worcester; and I have been reliably informed by one of the residents of Gheluvelt Avenue, that there is a road named after it somewhere in Cornwall. (The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry having also fought at Gheluvelt. There was also further action on the Gheluvelt Plateau during the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917

## The Foxholes



Records dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century show that there were two large houses in what is now The Foxholes. The road is named after one of these houses, 'Foxhole House, now number 53, built in 1842, which is at the western end of the road.



At the far end, now no. 29, was Greenhill House (Greenhill Avenue backs onto the far end of the Foxholes). This was the main farm house for what was once a large market garden.

Evidence of this is the large number of fruit trees in the fields that were previously Sladen School fields – my husband has been known to go in there scrumping since the School was demolished. Joining up both of these large houses was, and still is, a track which goes down to the Stourbridge Road, and which was wide enough for vehicles. The top end in fact is still used by some of the residents as an access track to their garages. The lower part of the track is blocked off to vehicles, i.e. motorbikes but unfortunately there have been incidents of drug users/dealers parking round there out of site, and occasionally needles have been found. A shame, as it is a useful short cut to Springfield Park. The market garden has now of course disappeared and most of it has been used for housing.

No 59 is an interesting looking house. From the outside it looks rather like a cricket pavilion, with a balcony. The present owners, who have been there for a year, have gave me some information about its history, notably that it was built in 1905.



Most of the houses in the Foxholes are 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 'main' part of the Foxholes houses was built around the 1930s. (see photo below:)



At the end of the cul de sac, going right are a small number of bungalows used for sheltered housing (no's 36 – 46). The houses no 41 – 49, including mine, no 47, were built during the 1970s. See photo below

As these houses were built after the rest of the houses, hence the numbering system which really confuses those unfamiliar with the road. In other words the first house on the left is no 41 but on the right is no.2; then as the road bends to the right, into the Foxholes 'proper' the first house on the left is no. 1! Many a delivery van has had to make the awkward U turn at the top end of our road!! Unfortunately, unbeknown to us when we bought our house in 1988, the builder went bankrupt and sadly apparently committed suicide. Our neighbours at no 49's house was never finished (until later of course).

*Chris Vass*

