

## Local information

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Shrivenham. I'm going to talk about some of the facilities and places of interest in the local area. I'll leave some time for any questions you may have at the end and do my best to try and answer them.

I have selected a few of the most interesting places that might be worth a visit. You are in one of the most attractive areas of the UK - 80 miles from London and also with reasonably easy access to Wales and the South Coast.

1

This map shows our motorway system with Swindon our nearest big town almost in the centre. Swindon is very close to the M4 halfway between London and Wales.

The village of Shrivenham is in Oxfordshire and close to the borders of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. It has a population of about 3,000 people and for the last 1000 years Shrivenham's history has been linked with that of Beckett House. This lovely building is now the Management Leadership and Defence Courses centre of the College. When the War Department bought the Beckett estate this building was the manor house that went with the 800 acres of land that the Academy occupies today. Shrivenham has a history going back over 2000 years. If anyone is interested in Shrivenham's history, this little booklet is available from the Post Office in the village. This tea towel has printed on it a walk around "Old shrivenham" which is featured in the Guide Book. You can see for yourselves the old thatched cottages and so on. But what you want to hear about is what is the area like today and where can you go during your free time with your families and friends.

2

Before I move on, here is a list of most of the activities and clubs that are on the campus. They are open to all of you and most charge a moderate joining fee. They range from archery to volleyball. With one exception the Beagles or hunting dogs are no longer kept here. You name it we try to provide it. The only sad thing is that your heavy workload may get in the way of sampling many of these activities.

Water sports usually take place on the Farmoor reservoir near Oxford about 20 miles away. The 18 hole golf course on the campus is delightful - apart from the new security fence that surrounds it in places.

Now, a few words about Shrivenham itself. It is a village with a population of about 3000 people. It lies in the Vale of the White Horse and gets its name from this white horse at Uffington. It looks a little strange being elongated - it is the oldest white horse in the country being about 3000 years old. You can see it from the village and various parts of the Academy. It is carved out of the chalk of the North Downs. Shrivenham village is a friendly, caring place and is surrounded by agricultural land and farms. It is an attractive English village having its share of thatched cottages. You all know what I mean by "thatched" the roof being made out of dried grass or reeds.

It has 2 churches, a primary school ( our children are obliged to attend full time school when they reach the age of 5). By the way, both Shrivenham and Watchfield schools are very good but for those of you whose mother tongue is not English you will find that the Watchfield school caters especially for the children from abroad who enter the school having very little knowledge of English. They learn quite quickly.

Back to Shrivenham. In addition to the 2 churches and the primary school there is the Doctors' surgery at Elm tree House, a florists' a small Co=op supermarket (a larger one is at Watchfield), a DIY shop, a sub-branch of Lloyds Bank which means it only opens for limited hours – 9.30 – 2.0pm, but fortunately it has a cash point machine. There are 3 pubs and 3 restaurants. All pubs and restaurants are obliged by law to display their prices. Restaurants can be very expensive so its best to check first. You can usually get a reasonable meal in a pub but not with all the trimmings.

There is pharmacy in Shrivenham, a Chinese takeaway and no village would be complete without its Post Office. It is the hub of the village. Here you can get your car tax discs, euros and dollars, pay your household bills such as electricity, gas and water, buy phone cards, premium bonds, greetings card and envelopes and do simple banking transactions when Lloyds Bank is closed. This is in addition to buying your stamps or posting your parcels. 1<sup>st</sup> class stamps cost 34p 2<sup>nd</sup> class 26 pence.

3

Swindon is our nearest big town, population of about 120,000 and is roughly 7 miles to the west. Shrivenham lies on the A420 between Swindon and Oxford. These are 2 very different places. Swindon is a working town whilst oxford is a university city with correspondingly more cultural facilities. When you drive to Swindon one of the first things you will see is the Magic Roundabout. Don't be dismayed by the series of 5 roundabouts grouped around a central one. Just take each roundabout one at a time, giving priority to those vehicles emerging from t he right. It's quite easy once you get used to it and greatly facilitates the flow of traffic.

Australian tea-towel

Swindon is a boom town, a former railway town, and has very little unemployment. Because it lies close to the M4, the motorway linking London to Wales and intersects with other roads running north to south it has attracted a variety of light industry as well as a huge Honda car complex and Motorola. The headquarters of the Nationwide Building Society and the Insurance company Zurich are also located in Swindon.

Until the coming of the railways in the 1840's Swindon was the size of Shrivenham today. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was a giant in the field of engineering – he designed and built ships, bridges, railways and tunnels. He was the guiding light in the construction of the Great Western Railway. In the 1840's the Victorians saw the start of the building of the railway from London to Bristol. From London to Swindon the gradient was relatively easy. However, from Swindon the engine needed to be changed because of pulling the trains over the hills to Bath and Bristol. Brunel was

heavily involved in the construction of the new railway only he disagreed with the narrow gauge track adopted by all the other railway companies. He strongly recommended the broad gauge track for when the change of engine took place at Swindon and for nearly 50 years there was no problem. The new engine trundled happily along on Brunel's broad gauge to Bath, Bristol or branched off to Cheltenham or Gloucester. Brunel realised that he needed somewhere to build and repair locomotives. There is a lovely legend that Brunel threw a stone out of a carriage window while the train was in motion, saying: where the stone falls I will build my workshops. It landed in the vast green fields just outside old Swindon. He was as true as his word and built the railway workshops that still remain today but now have a different purpose. Thus Swindon expanded dramatically for the new railway works provided secure jobs and good money for an otherwise agricultural society. It became the first railway town in Victorian England.

The Town Hall

The Town Gardens

The Bandstand

Queen's Park

Destruction/Conversion

As I said the trains ran for about 50 years on the narrow gauge from London to Swindon, changing engines at Swindon and then continuing on their way on the broad gauge to Wales. After a lot of anguished and heated discussion the whole track was converted to narrow gauge in 1892. The picture here shows 195 locomotives, 748 carriages and 3,400 wagons and vans lined up either for destruction or conversion. They simply were the wrong size for the narrow gauge. I guess that was pretty expensive.

Picture of the railway workshops

City of Truro

The Railway Workshops as they are today. They were closed in the 1970's. About 7 years ago the whole complex became a retail outlet known as the Outlet Village. Somebody had had a brainwave, recognised the nostalgia for the railway engines of the past and had incorporated full size engines, signals, clocks and some engineering parts into the immaculately clean premises which were to sell ends of ranges of famous brands of clothes, shoes, sports wear, jewellery, household textiles and glassware and so on. Your wives will love this place and will acquire good quality things at bargain prices. There's something for everybody – a children's play area; several fast food counters and seats for the tired.

Very close to this Outlet Centre is the Steam Museum. It's a hands on place where you can turn knobs and dials, climb up on to the engines and see for yourselves what it was like to work in a noisy, heavy engineering workshop. Things don't come much heavier than railway engines.

For any of you interested in ice-skating there is Swindon's one and only ice-rink at the Link centre. Also at the Link centre there is a fun swimming pool with a wave machine.

Before I leave Swindon I just want to mention the most useful shops.

ASDA supermarket is the cheapest; good and fresh food. You get to it by going on the orbital road by the turnpike roundabout on the A419. North Swindon.

TESCO Occotal Way open 34 hours a day ex Sun.

Sainsbury's a little more expensive but only 4 miles down the road towards Swindon a420

ALDI and LIDL very good prices much cheaper, limited range of foods

Marks and Spencer our most famous chain store essentially a clothing store but they do the most wonderful foods. Not cheap

If you like open air markets, go to Highworth on Saturday morning. There is the greatest selection of fruit and vegetables I've ever seen. 8am – 2pm

### Oxford Skyline

Now a word or two about Oxford. It's about 22 miles from Shrivenham on the A420. It's a totally different place to Swindon. Dominated by its world famous and prestigious university which began in 1214 it is also the place where BMW cars are assembled. City of dreaming spires, beautiful architecture with towers and pinnacles. The university buildings are all around us as we stroll through the city. It is not too large but is a veritable treasure house. There are now 37 colleges that comprise the University:

Merton College is the oldest – dates from 1264

Magdalen is the most beautiful

Christchurch is the richest

Merton was always the centre of scientific study. The school of astronomers, mathematicians, physicists and medical men at Merton assisted the transforming the conception of Aristotelian science into the beginnings of mathematical and experimental science.

You'll be familiar with Boyle's Law, well Robert Boyle was at Merton. So was Robert Hook and more recently Stephen Hawking. Merton has the oldest library in the country and is open to the public in the afternoons.

In New College Lane is the house and Observatory where Edmund Halley of comet fame, lived. In New College itself there is an El Greco painting and also a sculpture of Lazarus by Epstein. Oxford Science Walk.

Morse.

There are few modern colleges ST Cats is one

The Ashmolean is well worth a visit if you are interested in ancient Greek, Egyptian or Roman treasures.

Blackwell's Bookshop

Don't be deceived by the apparently small frontage. It is the university bookshop and it is enormous.

Other attractions include the Bodleian Library – a copyright library and it takes in 2 miles of books each year.

The Sheldonian Theatre where the colourful Graduation ceremonies take place throughout the year. In London there is the well known St Paul's Cathedral built by the famous architect Sir Christopher Wren. Well, his first public building was the Sheldonian. We reckon he practised here. It is truly beautiful and a credit to the young Sir Christopher Wren.

If you have children who love dinosaurs, take them to the university Museum where there is an iguanodon.

## Bath

Bath is about 40 miles west of Swindon. It is a world heritage city with its famous Roman baths that are fed by the only hot springs in Gt Britain. The architecture of most of the centre of Bath is Georgian about 1760= Jane Austen was no stranger to Bath. It's an attractive place with the river running through it. There are tiny shops on Poultney Bridge – a bit like the Ponte Vecchia in Florence. The university there is modern and as in almost any university city there is always something of interest to watch in the streets; jugglers, fire eaters dancers and opera singers.

## The Cotswolds

Swindon is right on the edge of the Cotswolds – a range of gently rolling hills, criss-crossed by shallow rivers and streams. The buildings are of the local Cotswold stone and are honey coloured with steeply pitched roofs. This is picture postcard Britain.

Bibury – a pretty attractive village with a trout farm – very popular so go in the morning.

Arlington Row at Bibury. The pitched roofs are porous

Castle Combe to the south near Bath is where the filming took place for the DR Doolittle film.

Burford – 17 miles north of Shrivenham is picturesque. The High Street is a hill with lots of 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture. Lots of little shops including the Peter Rabbit shop.

The Oxford shirt company is well worth a visit, selling top quality clothes for men and women. Just before you get to Burford itself there is the Cotswold Wild life park. It's a good place to see zebra, flamingos and camels etc.

Bourton on the water is the prettiest of all the Cotswold villages and also has a motor museum and a model village.

No talk would be complete without mentioning Stonehenge, 40 miles away to the south west. Another world heritage site it is an enormous pre-historic monument for predicting eclipses of the sun and moon. Some people believe it is an astronomical clock.

Silbury Hill is close by. This is a man-made hill but no-one really knows much about why it was made. Excavations have proved to be disappointing.

Avebury 20 miles away the other side of Swindon. It is older than Stonehenge and as you can see the village is within some of the stones.

The Wiltshire Downs are to the west of Swindon. I want to show you the Clifton Suspension Bridge designed and built by Brunel. This enable the motorist to cross the River Severn and arrive in Wales. Otherwise it meant going for miles to the north.

In 1996 a second bridge was built to cope with the traffic into Wales when crossing the river.

A picture of Longleat House about 48 miles to the south west. It is the home of the eccentric Lord Bath. Long dyed hair worn in a ponytail, he loves colour and has painted the interior of this lovely inherited building in the most garish colours. There is a safari park with lions and other animals. If you go there try to avoid the monkeys who will sit on your car and remove your wing mirrors.

To complete the talk here are 2 pictures within 4 or 5 miles of Shrivenham. The White Horse Inn at Woolstone is a very attractive pub that serves good food.

Lastly, a thatched cottage at Uffington.

In conclusion I'd like to recommend this HIVE pack to you. Obtainable from the Jubilee Centre which is on the right hand side of the road as you leave the main Academy entrance and are going into Shrivenham. There is a wealth of detail, maps showing you where the supermarkets are, times of the Banks opening etc. Caroline who looks after the Hive section has many, many leaflets giving information on where to go and what there is to see. It has specially been set up for student officers and their families.