Memories of Shrivenham

1900 - 1960

Vivien Moss

Memories of Shrivenham 1900 - 1960

Contents

Foreword
List of illustrations
Introduction 1

Map of Shrivenham 2

Chapter One: Shrivenham 1900 - 1911 3

Chapter Two: Shrivenham 1912 - 1918 16

Chapter Three: Shrivenham 1919 - 1928 31

Chapter Four: Shrivenham 1929 - 1936 42

Chapter Five: Shrivenham 1937 - 1945 62

Chapter Six: Shrivenham 1946 - 1950 82

Chapter Seven: Shrivenham 1951 - 1960 88

Appendix: interview transcript: Ian Hurle and David Boobyer 97

The Village Now by Vic Day 103

Acknowledgements 104

Bibliography 107

Foreword

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

For more than a decade I have been visiting and learning about Shrivenham. It is a lovely village with a great sense of community and Vivien Moss has done so much to capture the spirit of Shrivenham in the sort of detail which can only come from personal recollections about a much-loved place. I hope everyone who reads this book will be as captivated as I am by the personal stories, and perhaps decide to record their own memories now for the benefit of those who will want to hear about them in the future.

Ed Vaizey
MP for Wantage and Didcot

Dedication

To Gerry,
who so loved Shrivenham.

List of illustrations

Shrivenham High Street	3
Elm Tree House and School	4
Almshouses, Claypits Lane	5
Ivy House, High Street	8
Wilts and Berks canal, early twentieth century	12
Detail from map showing farms	13
Men's Institute and old post office	16
Canon Hill at the old vicarage	18
St Andrew's Church	19
Army manoeuvres: Royal Scots Greys at Shrivenham	23
Army manoeuvres: Sir Evelyn Wood and Scottish Rifles at Shrivenham	24
Harold Claridge outside Memorial Hall	30
Beckett House with orangery	37
Opening of the Memorial Hall	39
Mr Ford, Memorial Hall groundsman	40
Hammonds' shop	49
'Crusty' Fuller outside the bakery	50
The Barrington Arms	55
West End	57
Lord and Lady Barrington hosting the Old Berkshire Hunt	59
Ration book issued to Jane Hammond	63
Avro Anson	63
Certificate awarded to returning service personnel	77
Shrivenham Manor House	80
Cottages in Hazells Lane	93
Methodist Church	95

Unless otherwise stated, all photographs are copyright Paul Williams and used with kind permission.

Introduction

Over the last forty years many residents have shared with me their memories of Shrivenham as it used to be, a small agricultural village. Recollections include the arrival of the first motorcar, the start of the Great War, the Depression, the novelty of early radio and piped water, together with Lady Barrington's legacy to the village. Later, there are accounts of life in World War II with Americans and military tailors who took up residence here. The impact which the arrival of the Royal Military College of Science had on the village is also mentioned.

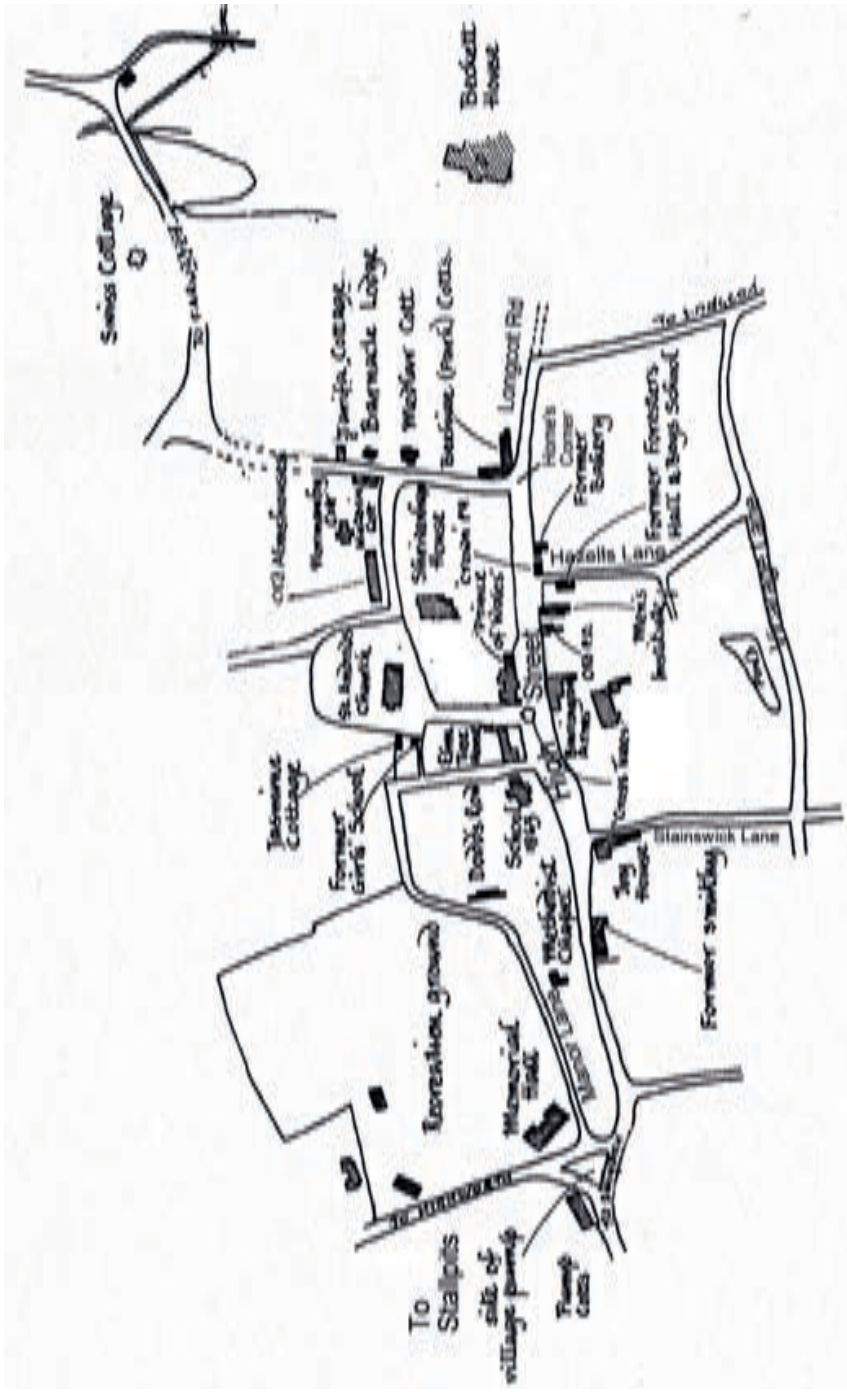
I am most grateful to the many people who have happily and generously shared their time, memories, photographs and documents. This book is intended to be a testament to them, and to all the other inhabitants of this community over the years.

In addition, I am indebted to Paul Williams who has given me permission to reproduce the William Hooper photographs of Shrivenham for which he holds the copyright. My thanks also go to David Boobyer for providing his interview with a war-time evacuee in Shrivenham, to Roy Selwood who has given permission for the reproduction of his hand-drawn map of the Beckett Estate c1925, to Keith Hamilton-Morris for researching the Great War military records, and to Edna Day for allowing me to include Vic's poem *The Village Now*.

The Shrivenham Heritage Society Committee members have been supportive and helpful, providing me with free access and assistance in finding figures and events in the many documents the Centre has gathered.

Last, but not least, I appreciate the unstinting help from my daughter Jennifer in my struggle with the computer.

Vivien Moss
November 2014



Shrivenham, Courtesy Les Judd and Anne Stevenson

Chapter One: Shrivenham 1900 - 1911

At the start of the 20th century, Queen Victoria was still on the throne, the United Kingdom was the richest country in history and the British Empire, with Victoria as Empress of India, included Canada, India, Australia and large parts of Africa.

Shrivenham, a small Berkshire village nestling in the Vale of the White Horse, was a sleepy community with its cottages and houses clustered around a wide High Street. The 1901 census records a population of 951. It had a parish church, a Methodist church, its own school, several shops and four public houses. The village had two butchers, a baker, and a blacksmith as well as a policeman, a post office and a slaughterhouse. People lived closely together in a tightly knit community much as they had done since the Middle Ages. In the words of Les Judd, from a long-established Shrivenham family, *"It was an insular world and most people knew little about life further afield"*.

Shrivenham was typical of most villages with the parish church at its centre. The village at this time ended at Tarifa Cottage on the Faringdon Road. At the junction of Church Walk and the High Street, where the old village cross used to stand, three enormous elm trees flourished and were known as the Cross Trees. Lime trees lined the High Street. Lord and Lady Barrington lived in Beckett House surrounded by an estate of about 1440 acres. The Barrington family owned much of the land in Shrivenham.

High Street, Shrivenham, 1910

In the early 1900s Shrivenham was a village of thatch, box hedges, and stone which had been carried from the nearby Taynton quarry. Box hedges ran along the Swindon Road from the allotments, then known as Poors Land, along past Pump Cottages, which were said to have been built in Queen Anne's time, and continued on past the thatched cottages in the High Street where the row of shops stands today. An old picture of Shrivenham School shows the box hedge growing just inside its low wall.

Elm Tree House and Shrivenham School, 1910

Most cottages in the village were thatched, making them cool in summer and warm in winter. Slate tiles were beginning to make an appearance in this part of the world in the early 1900s. The thatched roofs of the original almshouses in Claypits Lane, dating from 1641, were replaced by tiles in about 1909. Tudor House, on the south side of the High Street, was also originally thatched. I understand that Tudor House was the vicarage until Archdeacon Berens built a larger house, suitable for the clerical family and their staff, in 1820. This house, now two private residences, stands adjacent to the Barrington Arms.

Almshouses in Claypits Lane

The village had numerous ponds and a maze of underground streams, which today are largely dried up. In what is now Springfield Close there emanated a spring that fed into the network and made its way along Sandy Lane and Vicarage Lane, running into the pond that is now in Canon Hill's Gardens, before adding its waters to Beckett Lake. Mrs Joyce Walters remembers being told by her father in the 1930s, long before she came to live in Shrivenham: *"Never buy a house in Shrivenham because there is too much underground water there."* Les Judd mentioned *"the multiplicity of ponds in the 1920s. Every field had a pond and this was most unusual."*

Carrie Lock and her younger sister, Kathleen, lived at the post office and worked under Mrs Bennett, the then postmistress. Later Carrie took over as postmistress, a position she held for over 50 years. Kathleen also continued to work in the post office and took up bell-ringing at the age of 60 in the mid 1960s. Carrie Lock gave a talk to the Women's Institute in the early 1960s where she spoke about Shrivenham at the turn of the century:

"The population in 1904 was 600 and now it is 2,000. This excludes any of the College population. Several of the roads in the village were cobble stones and there is still one part remaining round by Shrivenham House. Where the Memorial Hall now stands was just one small thatched cottage, and there were no other buildings between this cottage and Stallpits Farm. There was no Police Station and the one policeman lived in a cottage in the village.

Lighting in the village was restricted to oil lamps until in 1934 electric lighting was installed, and until this date there was no piped water in the village and people had to rely on wells.

There was a daily horse-drawn coach from Swindon to Oxford, which returned the next day. It pulled up at the Barrington Arms and watered and changed the horses. The mail would arrive by coach from Swindon at 3am and at the sound of the driver's horn we would throw out the key tied to a duster to enable the mail to be delivered. The post office opened at 7am and closed at 9pm and the last despatch of mail was 10pm.

Shrivenham had an annual Fair, held in the spring, and this was carried on in the High Street but was discontinued during the First World War and never resumed again. The highlight of the year, however, was when the Ancient Order of Foresters held their Fete every summer in Beckett Park, which attracted a lot of people from Swindon and districts around."

The local doctor was Dr MacNamara, who had come to Shrivenham in 1899 as assistant to Dr Nixon, the village doctor at the time. Dr MacNamara had qualified in Dublin, and Shrivenham was his first and only practice. William Knapp described him as *"a character whom everybody respected. He was well liked everywhere and sadly missed when he died 46 years later."* Dr Mac (as he was widely known) lived first at Medlar Cottage, then at Normanby Cottage, and later at Elm Tree House. He was regarded with awe when he exchanged his pony and trap for the first motor car in the village in 1908.

Alice Day, whose family can trace its origins in this area back to 1602, recounted how she had heard earlier from her family how: *"the muffin man visited the village regularly. He would walk along the High Street ringing his bell to let everyone know he was there."*

In the domestic sphere it was often a problem to keep perishable food cool. The Barringtons had their ice-house close to Medlar Road, but the ordinary folk used to suspend their meat and butter in a loose bag in a well. If there was neither well nor cellar, some housewives wrapped their perishables in a wet cloth before putting them into the larder. Most gardens had a log pile and the time-honoured chore of wooding, searching the fields and hedges for suitable pieces of fallen wood for winter fuel, was necessary to sustain the supply of wood for the fire.

Signposts were few and far between and there were no street lights, except for the few the parish council had provided. A villager venturing forth after dark used either a candle in a jam jar or a hurricane lamp to help him see his way.

The greatest fear of the poorest in Shrivenham at this time is remembered as the stigma of going to the workhouse in Faringdon. The Barrington accounts books record entries for coal, wood or blankets for sick villagers. There was of course no comprehensive system of social security at that time. It was not until 1909 that the Old Age Pension Act brought about the first weekly payments to those aged 70 or more of between two and five shillings, and this was about 40 years before the National Insurance Act was passed which provided a national system of social security.

After Lord Barrington returned to live in Beckett House in 1905 with his new wife, Charlotte, Beckett Park was regularly used for cricket matches. Joyce Walters, born in 1916, remembered her father saying that the children of the village were always welcome to play in the Park. Her father lived in the area around Shrivenham at that time and knew it well. He spoke of mild winters with crimson sunsets and the lazy flap of the heron as it flew along the brook bordering the fifth hole on today's golf course.

Ivy House was a farmhouse whose buildings fronted the High Street and whose fields ran south along Stainswick Lane, known then and until 1966 as Ashbury Road. Walnut Tree House, now the Old House, stood alone on the opposite side of Ashbury Road looking over acres of farmland to the Downs.

Ivy House, High Street, 1910

In 1980 William Knapp recorded his memories of an older Shrivenham:

> *"I was born in 1904 at Walnut Tree House as it was called then, in the old Ashbury Road which is now called Stainswick Lane. The house is now called The Old House; it is stone built and faces toward the hills. My father was Mr Alfred Arthur Knapp; he was a builder and also a magistrate for about 30 years on the Faringdon Bench. My grandfather worked on Beckett Estate as a stone mason until about 1890 when he had to leave there. My father and my grandfather started up in business as builders. And that's how the Knapp building firm started. My great-grandfather built a cottage opposite the allotments which is now occupied by Mr Leslie Judd, and when he died, under the Enclosure Acts that cottage was taken by Lord Barrington. And that is how it got into the Barrington estate….The Knapps first came to Shrivenham in*

1649… All the Knapps in this district originally were related. That includes the Stanford in the Vale Knapps and various others.

A good many people will wonder why Horne's Corner is called by that name. Well, the answer is quite simple. There was a blacksmith of that name and he got into trouble with the Beckett people, Lord Barrington. Therefore Lord Barrington instructed all his tenants not to send him any work so he got very fed up, cursed the country and went to America; but the name still stands, Horne's Corner.

When I was a small boy the Royal Mail used to come through Shrivenham drawn by horses and stop at Shrivenham post office at twenty to ten every night dead on and return in the morning at twenty past three to drop off the letters. The occupant of the post office for many years was Mr Butler who incidentally gave my father a reference when he joined the Metropolitan police in the 1880's. After he died his widow, Mrs Butler carried on the post office until 1916 when Miss Carrie Lock took it over. Her and her sister carried on the post office until recently when it was moved up into the centre of the village. Going back to the horse drawn Royal Mail, we used to think it wonderful to be allowed to stay up to see this horse drawn vehicle going through Shrivenham - a sight that not many can remember.

Next coming up the street to where Bishop and Edgington now have a place, this formerly in olden days was the rectory in Shrivenham [Tudor House]. Many years ago when Mr Harris was the butcher there, some of the slates blew off the roof and I and another fellow repaired it. When I got up on the roof I had the shock of my life. Underneath the slate roof there was an old thatched roof which proved that the building was very, very old. I don't suppose there's many people that know this fact but there are two roofs there. Mr Harris of course many people will obviously remember. His daughter has a shop in Victoria Hill in Swindon. Inside this house I'm talking about there is a spiral staircase which I've often marvelled at the wonderful work and how slight the timbers were. There's not many of these about, I'm sure.

There have been many changes in my lifetime in Shrivenham. The old sweetshop that I went to as a youngster situated in the middle of Shrivenham opposite Ivy House. There were two thatched cottages built there in 1912. Previous to that as I was saying was an old shop and many years ago was a bakery business and occupied by a man with the name of Greeve. These cottages I think I said were built in 1912."

Bill Hammond, born in 1928, mentioned dates of some of the older cottages:

"The cottages by Clifton House which you access from Hazells Lane are called Jubilee Cottages and commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. The cottages at the top of Stainswick Lane are called Coronation Cottages and were built in exactly the same style as Jubilee Cottages in the year of King Edward VII's coronation [1911]."

Cheryl Anger spoke of:

"my amazement when I was told by my husband, Peter, who comes from a long established Shrivenham family, that in his grandmother's day there were seven children living in what was then our two-bedroomed Coronation Cottage."

At the beginning of the century, Shrivenham had neither the Memorial Hall nor the Recreation Ground. Dennis Stratton, who was born in 1923, recalled his mother telling him that*: "a thatched cottage stood on the land where the Memorial Hall is today. The occupant was an old lady who made and sold sweets".* When recent changes were made to the paved access to the Memorial Hall, a well and a brick cistern were discovered. It is believed those were for the old thatched cottage. Manor Lane was then just a track.

In 1904, Lord Barrington gave land for the express purpose of providing a reading room for the men of Shrivenham, the Men's Institute in the High Street, and funded the costs of building the room.

A number of new buildings were erected in the village about 1911. They included the three-storey building in the High Street containing today's post office. The police station in Townsend Road was built a little later in 1915. It is now a private residence. William Knapp recalled the first occupants as being Sergeant Garrett and PC Wheeler.

Shrivenham railway station

When the railway line was being laid in the mid 19th century, the then Lord Barrington directed that the new railway station should be at least one mile away from Beckett House. This accounts for its position south of the canal in Shrivenham.

Shrivenham railway station was the nearest point for several of the outlying villages. The station was a hive of activity; two consignments of milk for London were loaded daily, as well as boxes of freshly picked watercress from the clear water beds of spring-line villages such as Ashbury and Bishopstone. In *Just for a Lark*, a book in which he described farming in the early part of the 20th century, R H Wilson of Bishopstone, who farmed nearly 2,000 acres, wrote:

> *"[Shrivenham railway station] was "Action Stations" and was first and foremost a social centre. Sometimes the noise was deafening. In addition to the many sheep being ferried there were mixed consignments every Sunday night of cows, fat bulls and occasionally pigs destined for Smithfield Market. Courage and strength were often needed as sometimes there were ten or twelve bulls already infuriated at the indignity of being led along the roads for some six or seven miles. Later in the week on big race days there could be a dozen or more racehorses to be loaded from Russley Park and Foxhill. Each morning forty or fifty milk carts would arrive, mostly at a gallop, soon after seven o'clock, to put their cargo on the train."*

R H Wilson's farm collected and sold nearly all the wool from the hill farms on the Wiltshire Downs, and this would also be loaded at the station. He wrote that this would take two or three days to load, using the station crane to help load the trucks.

By 1900, the Wilts and Berks Canal, which runs to the south of the village, was in terminal decline, due mainly to the coming of the railway in 1841.

The collapse of the Stanley aqueduct over the river Marden at Calne in 1901 effectively ended what little traffic there was on the canal, although it was not formally abandoned until an Act of Parliament in 1914.

Wilts and Berks Canal, early twentieth century

The local farms

Shrivenham at the beginning of the Edwardian era was a typical agricultural village in many ways. Len Knapp wrote:

> *"ploughing the fields, planting and cropping in the spring and summer months, with hedging and ditching and more ploughing in the winter months, together with any repairs, kept the farmers and their labourers employed throughout the year. Dairy cows were brought into buildings from about November to April and this meant they had to be cleaned out and fed daily. Hay, straw cake and mangolds were needed until the cattle were taken out again into the fields. Most farms had three or four families living on the farms."*

Detail from Roy Selwood's map showing farms

The Barringtons' 1440 acres included most of the farms around Shrivenham which together provided employment for the tenant farmers and for many village residents. William Knapp in 1970 clearly remembered the occupants living on those farms at the turn of the century: Peter Westell at Friars Farm, Mr Hiscock at Sandhill Farm, John Skurray, one of whose descendants founded Skurray's garage in Swindon, at Stainswick Farm, the Plummers at Stallpits Farm, "Concrete" Wilson at Homeleaze farm and William Knapp's uncle at Cowleaze Farm. Robert Hedges was at Broadleaze Farm on the Longcot Road, and William Knapp recalled:

> *"Robert Hedges lived at Broadleaze Farm many years ago and while he was there he had a man who murdered two of his wives from Watchfield,*

John Carter. The one wife he pushed downstairs and he got away with that but the second one he buried under a drockway going into the field. This of course has been written in the Press many times.

Homeleaze Farm was more or less destroyed by fire in the War and was in the Royal Military College of Science grounds. The nickname "Concrete Wilson" was earned one day when he had his men loading wheat into a wagon and I think sacks of wheat used to be reckoned at 12 by 12 which is about 240lbs, about two hundredweight, and they were making a fuss about it. And he came out and he says to them: "if I had my boots on I'd kick them over the bar." That about sums up most of the farmers in Shrivenham in the olden days."

The seven largest farms in the village provided a mix of arable and dairy farming. The fertile fields in the area produced wheat, rye and flax. Len Knapp recalled the strawberry roan and blue roan cattle in his meadows. These gave way to Friesians in the mid-1930s. Vic Day recalled that his mother would always use the milk of a newly-calved cow to make junket. Pam Ilott, from a well-established Shrivenham family, spoke in 1980 of all the sheep that used to be in the fields around Shrivenham. The farms provided employment for the labourers whose various occupations in the 1901 census include shepherd, cowman, wheelwright, harness maker, and blacksmith. Almost all the cottages in the village had a good-sized garden – ideal for growing fruit and vegetables and keeping chickens. Dennis Stratton, whose family had been here for generations, said:

"everyone had chickens and also kept a cockerel. The village was quite noisy at cockcrow each morning."

In addition to the agricultural workers, several men in Shrivenham worked for the railway as signalmen or gangers.

In a talk given to the Young Wives group in 1979, Les Judd, describing North and West Berkshire, quoted from Nigel Hammond's book, *The Vale of the White Horse*: *"The tide of progress stirs just so much to avert stagnation; where men go about*

their task in a spirit of serene leisureliness". Shrivenham was then in the north west of Berkshire and Les Judd commented that the rest of the world was using tractors 30 years before Shrivenham had them and that Nigel Hammond's description well fitted the village. According to Vic Day, the village retained its old world customs and archaic forms of speech such as: *"How bist tu*?" until well into the 1940s. "Acorn Bridge" was pronounced "Ackern Bridge". Few strayed beyond the confines of the village and Les Judd gave fervent thanks for the arrival of motorised transport in the late 1920s.

Longcot Road, 1910

Chapter Two: Shrivenham 1912 - 1918

The first motor bus came to Shrivenham in 1914. It followed the order of the day by having solid tyres and a top speed of 21 mph. There were one or two bicycles but most people walked everywhere. Bernard Butler, who lived in "The Firs" in the High Street and who joined the Royal Flying Corps just before the outbreak of the Great War, recalled how men used to walk to Swindon and back for their work. It made for a long day, he said.

Shrivenham had a branch of the Ancient Order of Foresters. It was one of the oldest Friendly Societies, founded in 1834 but having its roots in a much older society called the Royal Foresters, which was formed around 1745. Foresters retained as their guiding principle the duty to assist their fellow men as *"they walked through the forests of life"*. In return for payment of a few pence a week into a common fund, members and their families knew financial help would be at hand in times of extreme need, for example in the event of a breadwinner's illness or death. Foresters' Hall was in Hazells Lane, adjacent to the Treatment Rooms of today (formerly Dike's Store, and latterly The Thatched Shop).

The Men's Institute is the building in the centre of the picture, with the old post office directly to the right. The thatched building was Dike's Store, behind which was Foresters' Hall

Alice Partridge, born 1911, remembered how:

> *"Manor Lane was known as Back Lane. On market day, live animals were penned there waiting to be brought into the High Street to be auctioned. I also remember the large red May tree growing at the place where vehicles today enter to deliver their goods to the Co-op. I was born in Pump Cottages and I remember how the pump on the Green supplied water for all the cottages and had to be carried in buckets for washday. It also provided the drovers with water for all their sheep as they moved them either to market or to a different pasture."*

In addition to the Annual Fair, a further highlight of the year was the Great Western Fete, organised by the Ancient Order of Foresters and hosted each summer by Lord and Lady Barrington in Beckett Park. Hundreds of workmen engaged at the Swindon Railway works were invited with their families each year, together with the whole of Shrivenham and the surrounding villages. Len Knapp described Lord Barrington on these occasions, who was slightly lame, as wearing a cap and cloak and dressed in tweeds.

Canon Hill

Shrivenham's vicar at this time, Canon E.F. Hill, was a central figure in the village. Appointed in 1890, he was vicar for 42 years. R.H. Wilson of Bishopstone wrote in *Just for a Lark* that:

> *"Canon Hill was very fond of his pipe but had been so strictly disciplined by Mrs Hill that he was never allowed to smoke indoors….[he] was loved by everyone - despite his readiness to engage in political arguments".*

Alice Day remembered that the vicar of Shrivenham and his wife were highly thought of for the concern and fairness they showed - and also how tall they were!

The vicarage grounds at this time extended down to Vicarage Lane - an area of two or three acres complete with pond, orchard, paddock and a beautiful garden. Canon Hill was the Chairman of the Almshouses Charity (established in 1641

by Sir Henry Marten), which provided subsidised housing for villagers in need. He was often called upon to settle disputes in areas other than the church, and was a competent horseman.

Canon and Mrs Hill in the garden of the old vicarage

Les Judd told a tale that had been handed down to him:

> *"One night the canon was cycling back home after spending an evening as the guest of the Barringtons, no doubt having enjoyed their excellent cuisine and wines. As he turned into the High Street he became aware of a certain parishioner staggering along, having just left the Prince of Wales. Canon Hill called out: "Drunk again, I see, Ebenezer" to which came the cheerful reply, "Aye. Zo be I, Zur."*

St Andrew's Church

The church underwent a transformation at the start of the 20th century. An avenue of lime trees was planted along the approach to the church in 1900 by Canon Hill. The lychgate, designed by the Oxford architect C. Oldrid Scott, was erected in 1912, banishing the iron gates that had previously stood there to the back of the churchyard.

Inside the church the iron and oak chancel screens were replaced in 1901 to conform to the 17th century woodwork, and the marble floor in the sanctuary was added.

St Andrew's Church, 1910

Many of these changes were made possible by the generosity of members of the Milligan family, who lived in Shrivenham House. Mr Milligan and the Misses Milligan supported the alterations in memory of their sisters Mary and Alice.

The handsome brass eagle lectern was the gift to the church from Mr John Day of Stainswick Farm. He gave it in memory of his son who died in the Boer War at Pretoria in 1901 at the age of 18. There was a ring of only six bells, compared with today's ring of ten. Mark Child, in *Discovering Church Architecture,* says these six were the result of recasting by Mears and Stainbank (makers of Big Ben and Bow Bells in London) in 1908.

Mr Ronald Guyon, organist at St Andrew's church for just short of 50 years, wrote that the organ was built by Lindsay Garrard of Lechlade in 1900 or earlier, and was constructed of parts of disused organs. It cost £230 and was later re-cased and re-constructed by Garrard in 1912.

William Knapp told the tale of a prank in the early part of the century:

> *"Referring to the churchyard in Shrivenham there's an oblong tombstone on the side of the path where you go along by Shrivenham House garden. Granny Hazell used to keep the Prince of Wales and the Hazell's name was given to Hazells Lane. Granny Hazell had a grandson, Tom Hazell, who was a tremendous fast bowler in that day when he played for Shrivenham. It was reckoned that he could bowl as fast as anybody. And this Tom Hazell liked playing pranks on people. One night he knew that James Knapp and John Knapp who lived round the Faringdon Road where Florrie Bunce lives now were doing the bakehouse oven in the shop by the Cross Trees that was. And he knew they would be coming out roughly about 3 o'clock in the morning so Tom Hazell gets on top of this big tombstone and pulls a white sheet all over himself. When James Knapp and John Knapp come round the bend where the lych gate is now, they saw this white figure on top of the tombstone, they took to their heels and tore down the church lane and down the street as hard as they could go, frightened to death."*

Lord and Lady Barrington

Walter Bulkeley, 9th Viscount Barrington, had married Charlotte Stopford in 1905, both having previously been widowed. They brought a total of 12 children to the marriage. Their London house was in Eaton Square; in addition to Beckett House, there was a property in Bournemouth. They spent time at each of these houses.

Lady Barrington reminisces in her book *Through Eighty Years (1855-1935)* that *"there was a vortex of gaiety prevailing just before the war. Dinners of 11 courses were regularly given."* However, the longer the Barringtons spent at their country retreat at the Beckett estate, the more Charlotte recognised what she described as the appalling monotony and stagnation of village existence that was the lot of the villagers. She described how:

> *"If we visited the many two-roomed cottages it was impossible not to recognise the wellnigh impossibility of bringing up a family in decent conditions. Again, in one dwelling would be found the village seamstress slaving in the cramped*

surroundings, unable to employ the girls whose help in an airy room would enable her to make a thriving business, and to give them the means of earning a few shillings a week. In another, the overworked mother, slowly losing health and strength for want of the rest and change there was no one at hand to supply. A little further on, in a labourer's house, a child of defective sight was given up as incurable in default of the specialised treatment there was no friend to provide. And in yet another cottage, a boy or girl of exceptional talent was condemned to some blind-alley employment or uncongenial occupation for want of the guidance and practical help which the Care Committee or Welfare Worker supplies in the towns."

The cottages were dark, damp, badly ventilated and without a bathroom. The privy was at the bottom of the garden and mice shared the tenancy of most houses. And there was no refuse collection as there is today. Lady Barrington wrote of:

"…overcrowded homes, the inadequate wages (especially in rural districts) of the working classes; the hard struggles to provide homes, food and clothing for a numerous family on 11s or 12s a week – conditions breeding as many failed to realise at the time, a spirit of unrest and revolution only averted possibly by the outbreak of the Great War."

Lady Barrington was also concerned by the decline in Shrivenham's population. The 1901 census records the population as 951, whereas the 1911 census shows the population as 602, reflecting the national drift from villages to the towns. Men were exchanging the peace and uninterrupted tranquility of the land, where heavy horses were harnessed to carts, for the noisy, oily workshops of the Great Western Railway (known as God's Wonderful Railway). With higher wages and the chance to live in a modern house in places such as Rodbourne Road in Swindon where there were shops and other facilities, including a hospital, it was not surprising that some men and their families decided to move for a higher standard of living. In addition the giant railway works gave privileged tickets and free passes to enable the workers to go on holiday once a year, in contrast to the lot of the agricultural workers. Charlotte's objective was to stem the exodus to Swindon by improving

the standard of living and providing a village hall in the midst of a recreation ground, where various social groups could meet.

With facilities in the "Rec" (how she abominated that term for the Recreation Ground) for football and cricket, she was putting into action the thought that *"the village that plays together stays together."* She began a fund-raising campaign in London for a Welfare Institute, by which she meant a village hall. Lady Barrington envisaged this as a blueprint for other villages in the country. With her wealthy and influential contacts in the world of the theatre and the aristocracy, she raised a considerable amount of money.

Charlotte was involved in so many various assemblies for the youth and women in Shrivenham that she found it necessary to engage a social worker, who continued in this rôle until the outbreak of war in 1914, when her services were required elsewhere. Charlotte also rented an empty house as a headquarters in the village. The house was used both as a social centre and as a place of instruction for young people. The women of the village joined sewing classes there, and a lady organiser oversaw social evenings for girls to participate in dancing and games. The men of the village already had the Men's Institute opened by Lord Barrington in 1905 as a reading room. Most villagers were able to read, but many could not afford to buy newspapers and books. They were freely available in the Institute, which was also used for table games. The Institute provided an alternative social hub to the four public houses in the village.

When the casualties of war started to arrive back from the trenches, Charlotte came to realise that there would be a great need for homes for disabled servicemen of the neighbourhood returning from the Front. The provision of cottages specifically for those hurt in the conflict became her first objective. She published and circulated a pamphlet entitled *Village Homes and Welfare Institution for disabled ex-Servicemen*.

The Great War

Army Manoeuvres: the Royal Scots Greys at Shrivenham

Army manoeuvres had taken place in Shrivenham High Street in 1909. In his *Villages of the White Horse,* Alfred Williams, the famous hammerman poet from the Railway Workshops in Swindon, comments that the Vale of the White Horse provided *"an ideal ground for military manoeuvres*". Many mock battles were waged *"along the slopes and plains, amid the wheat stubble and the turnip fields*" from Malmesbury and Swindon in the west to Reading in the east, and each lasted for three days. Altogether about 70,000 troops were involved. In one battle the "Reds" attacked the "Blues" in Shrivenham as they retreated from Faringdon. Their objective was to take Faringdon Folly. I understand that turnips were hurled with great ferocity by both sides.

On 4 August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. David Jenkins, who has lived in Northam House for over 35 years, shared this memory:

> *"I was in conversation with William Knapp some years ago - we bought our house from him - and this must have been when he was well into his eighties, a few years before he died. Always a peaceful and religious man himself, he was telling me how vividly he remembered the first day of the First World War when he must have been about ten years old. He was with other, older*

young men working in the fields towards South Marston that sunny summer's day in August 1914. All of them would have been aware of the impending situation in Europe. The hooter at the Swindon Railway Works let out ten long blasts which echoed and carried over the fields. This was the expected signal to mobilise.[1] William saw all of those young men straightaway drive their pitchforks into the ground and leave them to go directly to enlist to serve in the war. He remembered the pitchforks being left standing in the summer fields, never to be reclaimed by the young men who were never to come back. Although only a very few words, Will's memory conveyed to me very sharply the poignancy of that moment and its impact on the hitherto peaceful rural life that would have enveloped Shrivenham at that time. Those young men would have gone to do their bit patriotically, bravely, brightly and naïvely - not knowing anything of what awaited them. Nor how the world was about to change."

Sir Evelyn Wood and Scottish Rifles at Shrivenham

[1] W D Bavin's *Swindon's War Record,* which was prepared for Swindon Town Council in 1922, reads: *"The order to mobilise was given on Tuesday, August 4th, at 7.49pm by the pre-arranged signal of ten blasts on "the hooter" at the Great Western Railway Works, and within minutes excited crowds were streaming towards the Park in New Town or the Old Town Drill Hall, where the men were promptly reporting themselves."* A further ten blasts from the hooter came on Thursday 6 August at 8.50pm.

Conscription was not introduced until 1916. It has been difficult to establish how many men and boys volunteered from Shrivenham. Of those who did, nine were killed. Watchfield, although a smaller village, lost eleven men in the conflict.

On Armistice Day each year in November, Shrivenham remembers the nine men from the village who did not return from the war. They were:

Bertie William Ballinger 1880-1916

Bertie was born in Shrivenham in 1880 to parents Thomas and Sarah. They lived in the village, where Thomas was a farm labourer. Bertie was the youngest of their four children. Bertie's brothers were Edward born 1872, Charles born 1875, and Thomas born 1878. By 1911 Bertie had moved to number 2 Great Western Terrace, Lydney, Gloucestershire as a boarder and was employed as a carter.

Bertie enlisted in Caerphilly, Glamorgan in 1915 and joined the Worcestershire Regiment. His medal card is under the name of William B Ballinger but clearly has his service number, 18554. He commenced service in the Balkans theatre of war on 26 August 1915 and was killed in action in Mesopotamia on 20 April 1916. This was during the siege of Kut by the Turks near Baghdad. Bertie's war lasted only eight months. His name is engraved on the Basra Memorial in Iraq, indicating that his remains have no known grave.

His brother Thomas also enlisted and was killed during the war (see below).

Thomas Ballinger 1878-1916

Thomas was born in Shrivenham in 1878 to parents Thomas and Sarah. The 1891 census shows the younger Thomas as 14 at the time and already working as a delivery boy in the post office. By 1901 Thomas had become a clerk. His siblings were Edward, born 1872, Charles, born 1875, and Bertie (see above) born 1880. In 1911, Thomas was single and living with his widowed mother and two brothers in Shrivenham.

Thomas enlisted with the Royal Berkshire Regiment on 25 March 1916. Research was difficult because he enlisted as Thomas Bellinger! Shortly afterwards, he was transferred to the Manchester Regiment and was killed in action on 15 October 1916. His war career lasted a mere five months and he was 38 years old.

Thomas is buried in the lovely A.I.F. Burial Ground, Flers, and the location of his grave is clearly marked. As Thomas did not enlist until 1916, he was not entitled to the 1915 Star but was awarded the Victory Medal and the War Medal.

James Ebbsworth 1870-1918

James was born in Idstone, Berkshire in 1870. He lived with his family in Ashbury until the 1890s. In 1871 his mother, Martha, is shown as "unmarried". She married Daniel Taylor in 1874. Daniel died within a few years and Martha is shown as a widow in 1881. In 1901 and 1911 James is seen living as a lodger in Shrivenham with the Enstone family in Hazells Lane and working as a farm labourer. James's siblings appear to have been John, born 1869, and Mary, born 1865.

At the very mature age of 45, James enlisted with the Royal Engineers on 18 August 1915 to fight in France but was later moved to the Labour Corps. He was shipped home wounded or sick during 1918 and died on 1 July 1918. He is buried in St Andrew's churchyard in the north-east corner. His headstone is of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission regulation design as seen all over the world. For some strange reason James's headstone faces outwards to the immediate boundary hedge, while all of the adjacent stones face inwards.

James's next of kin would have received his Victory Medal, his British War Medal and his 1915 Star. These are known as Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid - the affectionate names given to the three WWI Campaign medals.

Harry Gealer 1891-1917

Harry was born in Cirencester in 1891 to Walter and Fanny Gealer. Walter was a Gardener Domestic at Shrivenham House when the Misses Milligan lived there. William Knapp confirmed that Walter was the gardener for the Misses Milligan for many, many years. Harry was the youngest of four children. His siblings were: Albert, born 1885, Ruth, born 1888, and Walter, born 1889. Their address in the 1911 census was given as "Cottage Shrivenham." Len Knapp remembered the family living in "a pretty thatched cottage set tight on the edge of the road opposite the churchyard wall in Claypits Lane".

By 1911, Harry was a Gardener Domestic like his father. Later, having enlisted in the Royal Berkshire Regiment in 1915, he commenced active service in France on 18 May 1915. He was promoted to lance corporal and was killed in action in Flanders on 3 May 1917. He is commemorated on the beautiful Arras Memorial in Pas de Calais, and has no known grave.

Following the war, Harry was awarded the 1915 Star, the Victory Medal and the War Medal.

William Walter Hall 1880-1916

William was born in Shrivenham to Henry and Charlotte Hall. His father was a farm labourer. William had five siblings: Arthur born 1879, Charles born 1882, Martha born 1885, Edward born 1888 and Henry born 1891. By 1891 William had become a farm labourer. In 1901 he is shown as a carpenter living in Wallingford.

In early 1906, January or February, William married Emily Georgina Butler, a dressmaker born in Wallingford in 1882. On 22 February 1906 William and Emily emigrated to Canada, sailing on the Tunisia to St John's, Newfoundland. In 1908 he joined the 92nd Battalion of the Canadian Highlanders. The 1911 North Monaghan, Ontario census shows the Halls living there with three small sons.

After war was declared by Britain, William enlisted in the Canadian Infantry and was killed at the Somme on 22 September 1916. The Battle of the Somme started on 1 July 1916. On that day, there were 57,470 British and Empire casualties, of which 19,240 were deaths. The battle continued for five months.

William is buried in the Puchvilliers British Cemetery, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, which contains 1,763 Great War burials.

George William Hicks 1895-1918

George was born in 1895 in Bristol. His parents were George and Fanny Hicks. He was raised on a farm in Sevenhampton with siblings as follows: Gladys, born 1893, Sarah 1898, Henry 1901, John 1904, Fanny 1906 and Elizabeth 1911.

George was a farm waggoner like his father, according to the 1911 census. They both lived at Round Robin Farm, Sevenhampton.

The records of George's military service are not very clear. His enlistment attestation claims that he enlisted in 1913 in the Royal Garrison Artillery. However the entry is badly smudged and the date is unlikely because his medal card clearly states that his service started on 20 May 1915 in France, and he was awarded the 1915 Star, and not the 1914 Star, which was awarded to earlier volunteers. He was also awarded the Victory Medal and the War Medal. Unless mistaken, his medal card also records that he was discharged on 1 December 1916, which is consistent with information that he was gassed. The Office for National Statistics death record shows that he died in 1918 and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission record shows that he died on 26 April 1918. It also shows that he is remembered with Honour in the United Kingdom Book of Remembrance and that his parents George and Fanny Hicks lived in Shrivenham.

According to Bill Forty he lived in one of the cottages opposite Ivy House in the High Street.

Reginald Charles Frogley Lawrence 1889-1917

Reginald was born at Stallpits Farm, Shrivenham to James and Martha in the spring of 1889. He is recorded there with many siblings in the census of 1891 and 1901 but is not to be found there in 1911. However, there is a sketchy record of him emigrating to Canada on the ship the Victorian in April 1905. There is a clear reference in Canadian Army records, 1914-1918, to Reginald Charles Frogley Lawrence in the "Soldier, Veteran and Prisoner list" and also in the Casualties records.

Reginald enlisted at Kindersley and was a private in the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion. He died on 14 November 1917 at the age of 28. He is buried in Dozinghem Military Cemetery in Belgium. The Canadians were heavily involved in the Great War, and many of the horses in the trenches came from Canada.

Gustavious Henry James Pound 1896-1914

Gustavious was born in Wingham, Kent in 1896 to parents Stephen and Caroline. His father was a watchmaker, born in Kingstone, Berkshire. Between 1901 and 1911 the family moved to Shrivenham. When Gustavious enlisted he was the eldest of six children, his siblings being: Doris born 1898, Gwendoline born 1900, Kathleen born 1902, Stephen born 1905 and Robert born 1908. Robert Pound was Sue Drew's father and Sue mentioned that after Gustavious's death, her grandparents Stephen and Caroline went on to have five more children.

Gustavious enlisted on 14 August 1914 as one of the very earliest volunteers. He joined the Wiltshire Regiment as a private but was very soon promoted to lance corporal. Within two months of enlisting he was fatally wounded and died on 15 October 1914. He is remembered on the Le Touret Memorial at Pas de Calais. He was Sue Drew's uncle and lived at what is now the "Old House" in Stainswick Lane.

Gustavious was the only one of these men to be awarded the 1914 Mons Star as well as the Victory Medal and the War Medal.

Joseph William Prince 1896-1915

Joseph was born in Shrivenham in 1896 and his parents were Joseph, a stonemason, and Olive. He was one of six children, his siblings being Ethel born 1888, Olive born 1890, George born 1892, Florence born 1894 and Herbert born 1901. The census of 1911 shows Joseph to be a Grocer's Boy. Dennis Stratton recalled that the Prince family owned the row of cottages on the left hand side of Hazells Lane, and that Dennis's family paid rent to a Joseph Prince. Len Knapp also associated the name Prince with the cottages in Hazells Lane.

By 11 September 1915, Joseph had enlisted with the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He was killed in action on 13 October 1915 in Flanders. His war service lasted only 33 days. His name is engraved on the Loos Memorial in Pas de Calais.

He was awarded the 1915 Star, the Victory Medal and the War Medal.

There were other volunteers who did return, some of whom had disabling injuries. Jean Mosley and her sisters were surprised and felt an overwhelming sense of pride when they discovered after their grandfather's death in the 1960s that he had been awarded the Military Medal in 1918. The medal is given for exceptional bravery in battle and Harold Claridge had never mentioned it to a soul.

Harold Claridge outside The Memorial Hall, 1926, courtesy Jean Mosley

Chapter Three: Shrivenham 1919 - 1928

The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, had promised to make Britain *"a land fit for heroes to live in",* and the Government's Social Service Fund was extended to provide money to build council houses. This was when the houses in Stallpits Road were built, and it was at this time that a sewerage system was introduced, benefiting most houses in the village. Drinking water was still taken from the wells.

Northam House in the High Street was built by William Knapp in 1919, and the bricks for the house were transported by horse and cart from Wroughton. William Knapp, uncle of Harold Knapp who owned the building firm J Knapp & Sons, moved into Northam House with his bride Daisy, having married just after the Great War ended.

Lady Barrington's vision of cottages or houses for disabled ex-servicemen was realised in the form of six semi-detached houses set around the Recreation Ground and two semi-detached houses on the High Street backing on to the Recreation Ground. Each of the new houses contained a living room, a parlour and three bedrooms as well as a bathroom, larder and scullery and good-sized gardens with workshops attached. Two of the houses had shop accommodation. The disabled men were carefully chosen so that their trades did not interfere with existing occupations in the village. A saddler, a bootmaker, and a bicycle-maker and repairer were among the first occupants. Mr Schofield lived in the left hand cottage on the High Street and sold shoes and haberdashery. The eighth and last cottage was built in 1925.

Shrivenham's population reached its lowest point in 1921 when the census recorded 592 people. From then on it increased a little, with the 1931 census showing 677 inhabitants.

Immediately after the war, Lady Barrington put her plans into action for encouraging people to remain in the village. The first meeting of the Shrivenham Women's

Institute was held in August 1919 in Beckett Cottage, with Lady Barrington as its first President. The WI continued to meet there until the Memorial Hall was built in 1925. Lady Barrington was a convinced opponent of women's suffrage. She sought to promote the interests of domestic economy and housewifely skills in the village girls. Cookery and sewing classes were part of the education she considered necessary for every young woman.

Alice Partridge left school in 1925 at the age of 14. She described her life then:

> *"I was first employed as a maid at Beckett House. I had to "live in" and I shared a room in the attic of Beckett House with four other local girls. We were given our board and lodging, paid five shillings a month and given one day off each week. The training in household management stood me in good stead for when I married and set up my own home. I was always grateful for that. I also remember the excellent dressmaker who lived near the church lychgate and the secondhand antique furniture shop that was in today's One Stop Shop on the High Street."*

Shrivenham School

Mr H Olliver had been headmaster of this Church of England School since 1883 and continued in this position until his retirement in 1921 at which time there were approximately 200 children in the school, educated from age five to fourteen. Annie Barrett, who started school in 1917, recalled:

> *"Mr Olliver was a lovely man and gentle. His successor, Mr Dance, was more brash and hit me across the knuckles several times."*

Mary Knapp remembered Mr Dance caning the boys so hard one day that she ran out of the school because she was so frightened.

Eve Weston recalled:

> *"When I was five I went to Shrivenham School and I left when I was 14 years old.*

Mrs Dance who taught the infants had a sand tray in the classroom where we learnt to trace our names in the sand. I remember Hammonds where they sold sweets in jars. When we had a halfpenny we bought gob stoppers."

Just before Len Knapp entered Shrivenham School in 1916, the small stone building which had served Watchfield as a school (situated about 50 yards from the Church of St Thomas) had been closed down and so Watchfield children came to Shrivenham for their education. The younger ones were brought to school by horse and carriage. Len described this carriage as *"a four-wheeled, covered wagon something like the gipsies used, but not as ornate, driven there and back twice daily by Mr Wyatt."*

In addition to the three Rs, the school timetable covered music, poetry, geography, and sports, including cricket and football. There were also craft lessons - cookery for the girls and woodworking for the boys - once a week for half a day's duration.

Behind Shrivenham School was Slade Farm, a small cottage and farmyard occupied by Percy Knapp. Len Knapp wrote that the headmaster Mr Dance:

"was a person very keen on birds, bird-watching and also bee-keeping so it will be no surprise that he was keen on gardening. He therefore did his best to teach us how to deal with these things, so an area was purchased, in what was part of the adjoining small farm, for the purpose of making school gardens. This was divided up into 20 or 30 small plots, numbered for each scholar, and the boys had to care for their own plot throughout the seasons."

Scarlet fever was a much more serious illness than it is today and was commonly written in the village school attendance records as the reason for absence.

Nan McGregor, whose descendants live in Shrivenham today, recalled how each child was given a school-leaving present. In her case it was a hymnbook and a prayer book.

Village life in the 1920s

Dennis Stratton, born 1923, spoke about life in the village in the 1920s:

"I was born at Wisteria Cottage in Shrivenham on the Faringdon Road. I was one of seven children and I lived there until the mid 1920s when we moved to Park Cottages. Behind us there was open parkland belonging to the Barrington family and this was where the village Fete took place each year in July when Lord and Lady Barrington welcomed everyone from the village. It was a wonderful Fete with huge steam engines. Lord Barrington was a real gentleman and was at ease with everyone he met. He was both liked and respected. The Barringtons, whose estate covered most of the village, gave the Memorial Hall and the Rec to be used for social functions together with the eight disabled ex-servicemen's houses for the benefit of injured Shrivenham people returning from active service in WW1. Lady Barrington had campaigned tirelessly for money from her musical and artistic friends in London so that she could fund this project. When the Memorial Hall was first opened there was no Bar allowed and in addition, no dogs or cyclists were allowed in the Rec. The village cricket team played in the Rec, there was football, too, and also two six-a-side hockey teams.

At this time my grandfather lived in the middle of the row of the original Almshouses in Claypits Lane. His rent then was one shilling a week. It was a one-up one-down dwelling with steep and narrow stairs leading from a corner in the living room. It had a lean-to kitchen at the back. It had a slate roof but years ago it had been thatched.

My grandfather had been in the old Anglo-Afghan war and had been forced to march 300 miles from Kabul to Khandahar through mountainous country in 1880 under the command of General Roberts. Not all his colleagues survived that. Incidentally, my grandfather was the last resident to vacate the old Almshouses which were about to be replaced in Marten's Road. He died in 1946. None of the cottages had piped water and every house had its own well for Shrivenham was well supplied with underground water. At our

cottage we had a huge tank outside with pipes attached serving two dwellings. This was to collect rainwater with which my mother would fill the copper and heat it to do the washing for the nine of us. In order to supplement my father's wages to help feed the seven children, my mother, Florence Stratton, used to take in washing from the gentleman who lived in Coplow House, Dr Pratt. I remember how she used to starch and iron his shirts to perfection. She would carefully iron the cuffs and collars saying you could only get them white with a real good boil. There was, of course, no electricity then. The irons were heated in the fire and the temperature gauged by a quick spitting on the hot base of the iron. We had oil lamps to light the cottage. At that time my father was a postman and he earned 28 shillings a week; the rent then was 4/6d. Interestingly agricultural workers earned 30 shillings a week but only paid rent of 3/6d a week. We moved up to Stallpits Road in 1933. My mother originally came from Barrow-in-Furness in Lancashire. Her family had moved around a lot before they settled in Shrivenham and so by 1913 she had had very little schooling. However, she learned to read and write in the tiny schoolroom in the Churchyard. There were one or two children with what we call special needs today and they were given extra lessons in this schoolroom on their own. My mother was fairly quick and soon benefited from this tuition.

There used to be a cottage for the Head Gardener of the Barrington estate and it had orchards behind it stretching down the Longcot Road. It was diagonally opposite our cottage. It was pulled down in the 1930s when the War Department bought the Barrington estate. However the house that was built adjacent to the Gardener's, but nearer the Longcot Road is still there today. It was occupied by a Mr Ferryman. He was the agent for Lord Butler who lived at Pinewood in Bourton. Everyone admired Mr Ferryman's model T Ford car which of course, was black. Up against the garage doors where he kept his car was a concrete apron on which we had our own wicket – we called it the concrete wicket. It may have been Lord Barrington's influence since he played regularly for the village team. For a cricket ball we used one of those very hard wooden balls from a coconut shy. Another of our activities as young children was to play our whips and tops down the length of the High St.

There were very few cars on the road then which meant we moved just to one side when a rare vehicle came and then continued our game."

The BBC was formed in 1922 and by the late twenties and early thirties the wireless was a feature in almost every home in Shrivenham. When electricity came to the village in 1934, Dennis Stratton remembered the battery radio being thrown out and the family plugging their set into a socket and being connected to the mains electricity.

In the 1920s a new kind of entertainment came in the form of silent films, and the Memorial Hall was used to show them. Dennis Stratton recalled that as a boy he and some other lads would stand and watch the people who could afford to pay go in to see these silent films. One day they were standing outside the Hall as usual and Ted Wilson, a gentleman farmer who lived in Ivy House, noticed them and paid for them to go in. Dennis always remembered this gentleman's kindness.

Both Peter Anger and Les Judd spoke of how nearly everybody went to church on Sunday and the boys were ushered into the choir. Les described:

"the annual high spot of the choir boys' outings in the 1920s and 1930s when they were taken by pony and trap for a picnic on White Horse Hill. This was the same pony and trap which was used for removals by farm and agricultural workers at Michaelmas or Lady Day. The traditional hiring of hands at Michaelmas and Lady Day was still operating. If the previous hired hand proved to be unsatisfactory or difficult, the bailiffs would turn him and his family out onto the side of the road. It was a common sight to see a family with all their goods and chattels on a flat wagon moving on to the next hiring."

Shrivenham boasted two butchers. Butcher Harris' shop was opposite the Prince of Wales. Mr Yeates had his shop and abattoir where the pharmacy is today, diagonally opposite Ivy House. William Knapp spoke of Frank Yeates who was the son of the butcher:

"His father used to have a big butchery business and he kept two trucks and Harry Lawrence used to drive one of these trucks round, and he couldn't read or write I don't think, and when he took the order he used to draw the joint on a bit of paper and Mr Yeates senior used to know what it was all about and it all turned out all right.

Frank Yeates who followed his father used to play cricket. He played down in the Park where the houses are built now and I can remember he got a cricket bat with a plate, an inscription. He made 104 not out. He was also very good in the slips. He had very big hands – they used to say they were like shovels."

Len Knapp described Beckett House in the 1920s as *"a lovely house in a beautiful position, with the artificially made lake, the beautiful lawns sloping down to it and especially beautiful trees in the lawn and in the grounds"*. He mentions the conservatory or orangery on the south-west side of Beckett House. This was taken down in the mid 1920s for reasons of safety. When Beckett House had been re-built in the 1830s, the then Lord Barrington had planted in Beckett Park at least one specimen of every tree that grew in the northern hemisphere.

Beckett House with orangery

Sale of the Beckett Estate

In 1922 the Beckett estate and five farms were put up for auction. One of the properties, Shrivenham Farm, was sold to the tenant farmer, H G Knapp who was known locally as Rimble Knapp. The *Swindon Advertiser* dated 20 October 1922 reported that among the other properties owned by the Barringtons which then changed hands were:

> *"the stone-built and thatched business premises at no. 23 High Street that, together with the adjacent building, Foresters' Hall, was sold to the tenant, Mr T Dike for £200". A solicitor from Swindon, Mr Pridham, bought the "picturesque stone-built and thatched bungalow with frontage to the Swindon Road". This bungalow is known today as "West End". Mr F Telling purchased an arable field known as "Townsend Piece" at the corner of Stallpits Road, comprising "6 acres, 2 roods and 37 poles" for £280. The allotments of similar size were bought by the Parish Council for £400 and which were then rented out at £12.10 shillings per year. Mr Fereman bought 3 roods and 17 poles of land on the west side of Station Road. Beckett House itself, however, aroused no interest."*

Six years later, Beckett House and the remainder of the estate were eventually sold and the family moved to Rickmansworth Park in Hertfordshire, a property inherited by Lady Barrington.

The Memorial Hall

The Memorial Hall was spoken of as one of the finest buildings of its kind in the south of England, with its lovely hammerbeam roof surpassed only by that of the Palace of Westminster. The Hall was formally opened on 18 July 1926 by Princess Beatrice. Ethel Schofield was chosen to present a bouquet of carnations to the princess on that day. Ethel's family occupied one of the Barrington Trust houses with a shop. Jean Mosley's mother, who was Harold Claridge's daughter, was another young lady who presented Princess Beatrice with flowers.

Opening of the Memorial Hall 1926, courtesy Heritage Centre

The Hall swiftly began to fulfil its purpose as a meeting place for the Women's Institute, the Girl Guides, classes, plays and other social events. Meanwhile, the Recreation Ground, which had also been given to the village as part of Lady Barrington's vision, was in regular use. Shrivenham's cricket team as well as the football and hockey teams all played there.

Harold Claridge, who had returned from the Great War with only one arm, was the first caretaker and took pride in keeping the Hall clean. His granddaughter, Pat Clauson, remembered hearing how he always buffed the dance floor by hand and she went on to say he kept his two allotments and his fair-sized garden in immaculate condition. He lived in one of the new Trust houses around the Recreation Ground and his descendants are residents of Shrivenham today.

Dennis Stratton spoke about the Rec:

"At right angles to our cottage was a larger building. It was used as a stable for

Charlie Ford's shire horse together with the large roller the horse was hitched to when Charlie used to cut the grass in the Rec. Charlie was the full-time caretaker of the Rec and he himself lived in the first house in the Rec close to the Highworth Road. The Rec looked a little bit different from how it looks today for there used to be flower beds cut out and these were beautifully cared for. There was also a Bowling Green; it was where the children's playground is today."

Mr Ford, Groundsman with "his large roller and equally large horse", courtesy Jean Mosley

The Great Depression

1926 marked the start of the Depression. Les Judd, a boy at the time, remembered it well:

"I was born here and my first recollection is of the Depression of about 1926 –ish. That was marked by hundreds of tramps, literally hundreds and hundreds of tramps, variously called "Gentlemen of the road", "Milestone Inspectors" or whatever. These would usually come along from Stratton on a Monday morning. You see, they would spend the weekend at Stratton workhouse institution, where they would chop some wood and do a few jobs for their keep, a bowl of soup and a bit of bread and then they would have to leave on the Monday. And of course, we're on a main route here. They would perambulate

between there and the next workhouse found at Wantage. They walked from workhouse to workhouse. Poor, undernourished wretches they were and there were literally thousands of them. They had a habit of calling at cottages and anyone living on the right hand side of the A420, or on the left for that matter, would have frequent calls from these people and if they found that they were received favourably for a crust or an old pair of boots or whatever, they would have to be old ones to be given them, they would leave some mark somewhere and of course successive tramps would come in and they could get very abusive. And we found them sat in the back garden as fires were going under the thatch. They would call for a can of water, a spoonful of tea, ma'am, a bit of bread and cheese, anything, they were absolutely destitute and they slept in sheds, hayricks, garden sheds, farmers often found them in hayricks and so on. All along the road you could see little tiny fires where they had got some tea from one and some bread from another and they had a brew up on their open fire. There were literally thousands of them. We used to dread them. There was one pious person, (can't mention names) things haven't changed that much, people were God-fearing then, some of them, some of the ladies who had this pretence of being holier than thou and went every Sunday to church. And although all the teachings of the church they looked on their fellow man as being something of a second class citizen if he happened to be a tramp, you know with a few fleas hopping on him and an old tatty coat, his toes sticking through his boots. He would knock at this door, this lady's house. She was a very upright sort of lady and superficially very religious. He said 'Don't suppose you've got a crust ma'am'. So she went to her drawer. And disdainfully gave him a crust."

Chapter Four: Shrivenham 1929 - 1936

Electricity came to the village in 1934, and with it piped water and street lighting, but only to the eastern side of the village. Dennis Stratton recalled:

> *"It was a matter of great wonder when the east side of Shrivenham, (that is, the College area and a few of the houses closest to it) was connected to the mains just before the start of World War II and the houses had a tap in the kitchen and running water. The rest of the village was not connected until after the war."*

While most houses in the village were connected to the sewerage system put in just after the end of the Great War, drinking water for houses not connected to the mains was still taken from the wells, abundantly supplied by the criss-cross of waterways that lie beneath the village. The well water was regularly tested for its purity by the Local Authority, wrote Len Knapp.

Village life in the 1930s

Dennis Stratton describes what Shrivenham was like in the 1930s:

> *"At this time in the 1930s, Shrivenham was a village of box hedges. They were everywhere and ran along the side of the old A420 from Swan Hill, past the allotments, in front of the old police station and then along Townsend Road. They were outside the Memorial Hall and then ran along the High Street and in front of the two cottages pulled down to make way for the Co-op and today's row of shops. In one of the cottages where the DIY shop now stands lived Tommy Moss. Next door to him lived Mrs Margetts. The land belonging to Maytree Cottage in Manor Lane extended to the High Street. When some of the land was sold and the two cottages pulled down there was a covenant placed to forbid any building more than one storey high so that the previous owner of the land could retain his view over to the Downs. About 1960 the cottages were taken down to make way for the Co-op and a Pharmacy.*

Altogether in Shrivenham eleven thatched cottages were demolished including the delightful ones in Hazells Lane. In their place six modern bungalows were built in the early 1960s. We also lost three big barns. One was the well known "Knapps Diary" barn, removed to make way for the houses in Catherine Close. A lovely old stone barn was removed from the school yard when some alterations were done to the school. It stood behind the school close to Manor Lane. The third was almost opposite the entrance to Manor Close today, nearer the Rec, but where the cars are now parked in the school grounds. Years ago on the right-angled bend in Manor Lane stood a lovely thatched house which was pulled down. I remember Fred Tucker from the Blacksmith's cottage opposite the Co-op. He owned a fair amount of land. In the 1930s we had two butchers - Mr Yeates had his shop where the Pharmacy is today, and later taken over by the Hursts. Mr Harris was the other butcher and his shop was next to the Barrington Arms.

The best pub in Shrivenham was the Barrington Arms run by Ted Chambers, father of Alec Chambers. Ted commanded a great deal of respect and brooked no argument. There was a mounting block just outside for horses, well their riders, outside the pub and it stood there until the late 1960s. The Cross Trees opposite the Barrington Arms was where the farmers congregated with their ponies and traps when they came to Shrivenham. We lads at this time took great delight in hiding ourselves in the hollow tree there whose wood was becoming very crumbly. We would keep quiet and then suddenly fling our garnerings at the farmers. They always knew we were there and with a roar of unprintable language bellowed at us."

I have it on good authority from some of the senior members of the village that the police sergeant in the 1930s, Sgt Lydford, would not only roar at any boys in the village, deemed to be misbehaving, but would cuff the boys around the head. Asked if this had any deterrent effect, one grinned and said: *"No. It just made us more careful about getting caught."*

Lois Plummer described Sgt Lydford as being over six feet tall and keeping a tight rein on Shrivenham. She wrote that there was no trouble and no crime.

Phyllis Anger, born in the early 1920s, has lived in Shrivenham all her life. She recounted:

"An abiding childhood memory of my early years is that a week or two before Christmas all the schoolchildren went to Dikes' store to see the Christmas tree laden with small toys. At Dikes you could buy almost anything one needed for living in the village. It was a real treasure trove. As we looked at the Christmas tree we were invited to choose a small gift. This was then labelled with our name and returned to the tree. Immediately before Christmas the Dikes gave a lovely party for all the children in the new Memorial Hall. Madeline was Tom Dike's sister and she worked in the store and she always said how much she enjoyed preparing the Christmas tree for us. We all took our own mugs to the party. We played games, ate our tea and then were given our presents. I usually chose a little doll. My sister usually had one too.

Madeline Dike went on to become a nanny to Lord Barrington's children and worked for a time in Cheltenham. Later she became Mrs Moon and returned to Shrivenham. I believe it was Madeline who organised the party for us children and it was Mr Wilson who played Father Christmas there.

Other childhood memories are of all of us children running up the High Street playing whips and tops. There was little or no traffic in the 1930s and we soon ran for safety if a rare car or lorry came along. The better-off children had their whips and tops bought for them but most of us cut a stick from the hedgerow and since string was not easily obtainable used an old shoelace to whip our tops. We spent time skipping with our ropes and I reckon we were perhaps a lot fitter than many children today. My pocket money was a halfpenny a week then. Willy Hammond's family used to make and sell dough cakes or lardy cakes and we bought one every week. As children we used to love standing by Benford's Bakery in Church Walk on our way to school. It was so warm and comfortable.

As I mentioned our family did not have a lot of money and we were brought up to work and my parents set us a very good example. I remember my

father bringing home an old bike that had been discarded. He worked on it painstakingly to make it usable for us children. It had solid tyres and was not very comfortable but it got us around. My father was a bell-ringer and my uncle was also. My family were churchgoers and we children had to attend Sunday School. Sunday in our house was always a quiet day. Just before I left school in 1936, I started doing some housework in the village for the grand sum of five shillings a week. This was quite a common practice in those days for the pupils in their last year of school to have some work experience. My father insisted that I had to pay for my keep and I was allowed to retain about two shillings each week. This was wealth indeed.

My first real job was delivering milk from Mr Day's farm which was on the land bordering the Highworth Road and Stallpits Road on the left hand side. The farmhouse was demolished soon after the War. It caught fire. I used to deliver the milk using a bike where a crate was fitted into the huge front carrier just like a butcher's boy delivered his meat. In this crate were about 20 bottles of half pints, one pints and sometimes quarts of milk. At first I would push the bike until it got lighter and it is my proud boast that never once did I spill a drop of milk."

Mervyn Penny, whose family arrived in the village in the late 1930s when he was in his early teens, said:

"Dike's Store was a real experience. Here almost anything could be obtained and the variety of articles was amazing. Adult customers were always addressed as either Sir or Madam. The boys were always "Yes, Jack", or whatever your name happened to be. Madeline Moon, or Madge as she was known, ran the shop for her parents, Tom and Nancy Dike. She was assisted by her partially-disabled husband Stan, who is recorded in Kelly's Directory as being the Honorary Secretary of the British Legion Club. Winnie Dike, Madge's sister, also helped. She was very short and looked over the counter with some difficulty. Brother Bill completed the staff. The father, Tom Dike, was in the shop now and again. He was the local carpenter and undertaker, sexton and bell-ringing foreman."

Mervyn went on to talk about the Men's Institute:

"It catered for both men and boys. I joined the boys' section shortly after we came to live in the village. The lads paid two pence a week for this facility. There was a billiards table in the boys' half of the room, which was separated from the men's section by a folding partition, and we boys also played darts, rings, dominoes and cards."

Dennis Stratton spoke of how schoolboys could earn a little money in the 1930s:

"As a nine-year old I remember going to Mr Freeth's house in Stallpits Road and every day I would pump up water from his well into a tank for their use indoors. For this I was paid 1/- a week that is five pence in today's money. Then, a shilling was a lot of money and I used to first of all buy a few sweets and I felt very rich.

Later on when schoolboys were about 12 years old there was another source of income if you were lucky. Miss Dike who later became Mrs Moon would pay 6d a week to the boys who used the builder's cart to move goods to and from the shop Dike's Stores, and to other locations in the village. This job was handed down from one boy to another at school.

The reading room was a centre for us lads and the men of the village. There was a screen dividing the room into two sections. The under 16s were on one side and the over 16s were on the other side. Here we played cards. Among the adults there I remember Mr Dickie Dance our headmaster and Sergeant Lyford playing bridge and chess. Sergeant Lyford was very good and used to play bridge for the county. The police station was well manned then and there were several policemen who lived in the police houses in Shrivenham.

As a boy I went swimming in the Stew on the Barrington estate. There were no fish there as the locks kept the fish out – the Barrington family and friends also used the Stew for swimming, it was their swimming pool. However, when

the locks were open we lads used to stand in the water having stripped to our underpants in order to catch the fish. We would then fling them on to the bank and later take them home for cooking. Usually they were pike. Another place that we lads used to go fishing was in the large pond at the bottom of the vicarage garden as it then was. It is now part of Canon Hill's Gardens. Canon Metford was the vicar then and my Dad used to do his garden. I remember his lovely orchard with its beautiful apples. I'm sure Mr Metford, who was a very tall man - six feet six inches I was told - used to turn a blind eye to us as we went in through the gate at the bottom and started to fish in the pond that was full of fish. I remember Mr Metford always used to visit all the sick people and any in trouble in the village. There used to be another vicar in Watchfield, a Mr Lowe. He was another tall man.

I do remember the former Vicar, Canon Hill. A group of us at the village school made a waste paper basket for him and one day we took it over to the vicarage. Canon Hill was pleased with it and thanked us for it. I remember him in his long black cassock and wearing gaiters. I was about ten years old when he died. My father used to keep the churchyard tidy and I remember we always used to scrub Canon Hill's tombstone and keep it clean out of respect for him."

The highly regarded and long-serving Canon Hill died in 1931.

Les Judd spoke of schooldays:

"In the school, even as late as the 1940s and certainly in the 1930s, the children of Watchfield were educated, I say that advisedly, at Shrivenham School. They were brought from Watchfield in a covered wagon with a horse, just like you see on the westerns, like a gipsy caravan and you could see all these little tiny faces peering out from behind these curtains and you could see Percy Knapp sat at the front. He would take them to school at Shrivenham and then he would take the girls to cookery on a Monday to Bourton. There was no cookery here. They had the old school at Bourton to do cookery and the boys to do woodwork. And the boys had to walk. It was only the girls who went in the wagon.

The girls had to get out at the station because the horse couldn't pull them all up and over the bridge. And when they got off with their pies or whatever they had made, Tommy Lockie who was a sort of resident tramp used to go up and ask them for their pies or a taste of them. He lived in a shed down at the coppice."

Lois Plummer's father bought a plot of land at the corner of Stallpits Road and Highworth Road in 1929. She wrote:

"My family moved from Jubilee Close to Stallpits Road using a horse and cart. The house had no services - the water supply came from a well. There was a flush toilet but as there was no sewerage a cesspit was made at the bottom of the garden. When this pit was emptied once a year the family went out for the day. The kitchen had a copper with a fire underneath for heating the water on washing day. The bath - porcelain on "feet" - was also in the kitchen, and when the copper was still hot after washday, more water was carried to fill the copper for the family to have baths."

Another local man, Bill Hammond gave this account:

"I am one of only two people today in Shrivenham who can say that they were born in the house they are still living in. I was born in 1928 and number 7 High Street, my home, was formerly number 17 High Street until it was re-numbered. My father William Hammond, worked as a baker for Mr Robert Pound who had a baker and grocer's shop in Shrivenham as well as a similar business in Ashbury. In addition to this, Robert Pound owned two mills. When Robert Pound died the Shrivenham business was bought by a Colonel Ames who brought Mr George Benford to run the grocery shop. Later on George Benford bought the premises from Col Ames and re-named it Benford's Store.

Hammonds' shop unchanged since the 1930s

In my parents' day one of our downstairs rooms was used as a shop and my father was well known for his baking – my father had always worked as a baker and lastly in what later became known as Benford's store until he retired in 1935. From then on he concentrated on his poultry farm in the Ashbury Road. My parents sold bread, groceries and fruit and vegetables. My mother then took care of the shop which became busier and busier after War broke out necessitating my father's presence back in the shop.

The house itself was built in 1866 by the Butlers who lived in Bourton in the family home which is now Pinewood School. Just as an aside, this family home was where the grandparents of the politician R A Butler who almost became Prime Minister lived. The young RAB regularly came back to Bourton in his school holidays to stay with his grandparents, Sir Kendall and Lady Butler, as his parents were abroad on Colonial service. The young RAB was always spoken of as being a very polite boy. Initially our house was first of all rented out to a harness maker, Mr Woodbridge,

for 30 years and subsequently rented out to a baker who installed an oven at the back of the house. My father bought number 7 High Street in 1923. Sadly, by then the oven was worn out and useless.

Thomas 'Crusty' Fuller with his family in the garden of the bakery 1905 before Bill Hammond's parents bought the premises in 1923. Courtesy the Les Judd collection.

I remember the first sewerage scheme when it was put in the village and also the arrival of gas, electricity and telephones. I can also remember Fred Tucker the blacksmith and Roy Day who delivered milk from his own cows. The bank first came to our house before the War. They put in another front door to the property and used one of our downstairs rooms to transact their business. This is why we have two entrance doors at the front of the house. The bank was open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. The bank's cashiers would come on the bus from Faringdon, bringing in their briefcases the sum of money thought to be needed. At the end of the morning, the remaining money would be placed back in their cases for the return journey to Faringdon. And the money never went missing. The first banksman was a Mr Moore who happened to be in the TA. And thus when the War started he was gone and the bank soon closed until after the War. They returned a few years later before building their branch in 1963 where they are today.

Shrivenham used to have three bends in the road; all have been straightened out now. At the top end of the village as you leave for Swindon a field was cut through to make it straight and a lovely little house was demolished. The Brickell brothers, Bob and George, erected a garage at the side of the new road. In turn they were succeeded by the Tyer brothers and then the Kettle brothers. In more recent years this garage has given way to the houses at The Green.

Shrivenham House was part of the Beckett Estate. After it was sold in the 1930s it was rented out. I remember a Lady Gifford who lived there soon after the main estate was sold to the War Department and later Lord Bonham-Carter was in residence there."

The village blacksmith was Fred Tucker, operating from Blacksmiths Cottage opposite the Methodist Church. The forge was close to the pavement and the horses to be shod stood waiting their turn in the High Street. In the ten years from 1935, the use of horses on the farms declined as tractors started to make their appearance. Catherine Gould, daughter of the farmer H G Knapp, said her father used to have an old Fordson tractor with spiked wheels. It was banned from the roads because of the damage the spiked wheels did to the surface.

I am told by the then young men of the village how warm and comfortable was the bakery wall in Church Walk in winter when they were talking to their girlfriends. Joe Dixon told me that when he was courting his lovely wife, who lived in Bourton, he would walk there and back along Steppingstones Way every evening after a full day's work. He and Bet were married for over 62 years and lived in one of the three-storey houses adjacent to the modern post office. Joe later became a driving instructor and lorry driver in the Royal Engineers and was involved in the D-Day landings in June 1944.

Jesse Miller had immense energy, was a great worker and could turn his hand to almost anything. He owned several properties, including Watchfield House. He and his wife had inherited Pennyhooks Farm where they stayed until 1936. His son, Bob Miller, remembered growing up on the farm and later moving to

Watchfield and attending Shrivenham School along with all the other Watchfield children. Bob revealed that Madeline Moon of Dike's Store had won a car in the 1930s when she successfully completed a *News of the World* crossword puzzle. It was a Morris Oxford, big and green.

Pupils who attended the village school in the 1930s remembered Mr Dance the headmaster as a strong disciplinarian with a short temper. His redeeming feature was that he was an enthusiastic gardener and he conveyed this to the boys who all kept their own little gardens at the school. Alec Chambers remembered:

> *"The school bees were kept in a cabinet fitted in a school window and the children found them fascinating. I lived in fear of the head and did not enjoy my school days, for Mr Dance wielded the cane regularly on all the boys."*

Tony Bradfield contributed this recollection:

> *"Only one boy ever got the better of the headmaster and that was because the boy was physically larger and very strong as he spent a great deal of his time working in the fields. He towered over the headmaster and one day was prepared to lash back. Mr Dance sensed this and backed down."*

Alec Chambers' father was the landlord of the Barrington Arms when Alec was a boy, and welcomed the various sports teams for their victory celebrations. At the time the village had its own hockey team and an enthusiastic cricket team. Shrivenham had previously had a competitive football team. Fined for an earlier misdemeanour, a measure they considered unfair, they refused to pay the fine and were therefore banned from playing as Shrivenham football team. So, showing true Shrivenham ingenuity, they called themselves the Watchfield team. Lois Plummer described an argument that ended with an unfortunate referee being thrown into the lake.

Another of Alec's memories was:

> *"…of the Hunt Ball being a very dressy affair in the Memorial Hall.*

There was always a live band who stayed overnight at the Barrington Arms. There was one occasion when the drummer was carried away by his enjoyment of the local beer and at the end of the evening was himself carried away on his drum along the High Street back to the Barrington Arms."

Alec mentioned the British Legion Fetes held during the 1930s in the field behind what is now Fairthorne Way. Vic Day and Les Judd remembered other village activities such as the occasional charabanc outings.

Helen and Harold Taylor explained how:

"In the mid-1930s, the firm J Knapp and Sons, originally started by Joseph Knapp, began to build houses in the village. The firm was a family concern. "Knapps" built six houses along Ashbury Road, now Stainswick Lane, and several in Sandy Lane. Two of the buildings in Ashbury Road were semi-detached red-brick bungalows, which were bought by the occupants of Shrivenham House as accommodation for their chauffeur and gardener."

Sheila Turner wrote of her family who lived in a cottage near Stainswick Farm for three years before buying number 3 Sandy Lane in 1936.

"In those days, unlike today, the road was put down after the house was built. Sandy Lane was just a muddy track when we moved in. It was a semi-detached house without electricity until just after the war. There were gas mantels for light. My father found it difficult to kill the pig the family had reared along with some chickens in our garden. In this pre-refrigeration time there was too much "pig's fry" for one family, and so friends, family and neighbours would happily accept any pork meat offered. In due course they would return the compliment when their own pig was slaughtered."

Babies were born at home with Nurse Donneux and Dr MacNamara in attendance. The nurse lived in one of the thatched cottages in the High Street where the hairdresser and the pharmacy are today. Bob Miller remembers that at times Nurse Donneux

would ask her sister, also a trained nurse who lived in the village, to come with her to a confinement if Dr MacNamara was not available. Nurse Donneux was a familiar sight as she cycled round to her patients, known to all and held in high esteem.

Transport

There were now one or two more motor cars on the road, mainly concerned with delivering goods to or from Faringdon or Swindon. Len Knapp recalled that one of the first cars was driven by Mr Fereman, agent for Lord Butler's estate in Bourton. This estate is now Pinewood School. Len remembered *"the agent with his long white beard chugging along the High Street in one of the earliest open-top Model T Fords."* Madeline Moon used to deliver grocery orders from Dike's Store on her motor bike, but only in the village.

Les Judd described transport in the late 1920s and early 1930s:

> *"The Great Western Railway flourished with its giant railworks at Swindon and workers employed in what they called the Works inside enjoyed privileged tickets and free passes so they could go on holiday once a year. It was not so much a holiday as a lockout. The firm closed down so they were given no choice. Other people were given no holiday at all - people like agricultural workers. Of course there were no buses, well there may have been one a day. I can't really remember when they started but the transport was shank's pony and pony and trap which most people couldn't afford except the gentry and we walked to most places. We had bicycles with oil lamps and carbide lamps. The transport system between villages was very poor. It was an unhurried pace of living. Well, the fastest thing through here would have been a milk float. It's no exaggeration. There were a few traction engines, steam traction engines. They came from Barnes of Rushey Platt and used to haul timber. One or two Trojans, Brooke Bond with solid tyres, dead flat windscreens, nothing aerodynamic. There's never been a fatality here, not in the High Street because they gave such audible means of warning approach. You could hear it coming down by Northford when it was cranking and hissing and you could get out of the way. You could play whips and tops in the road and do whatever you wanted to. A new steam traction was also used for agricultural purposes, for ploughing and so on."*

In the late 1920s, a petrol pump was to be seen outside Pound's Store (then owned by Sue Drew's family) by the Cross Trees. The pump stayed there after 1935 when George Benford bought the shop, which then took his name. Joyce Harvey (George Benford's youngest daughter) mentioned that her father had managed the baker's and grocer's shop for some time before he bought it. It was a family business, for her sister, Nina Buckland, served there for almost 40 years. Today it is Rafu's Restaurant.

Peter Yoxall was from another longstanding Shrivenham family which used to run the Swanhill Garage on the Swindon Road next to Holkham House. He ploughed his first ever field at the age of eight*:*

> *"It was adjacent to the Swanhill Garage, where I worked with my father on leaving school. There was also a café at the garage. My father talked about the few cars that were in the village in the mid 1920s. Lady Barrington had a Rolls Royce, Dr MacNamara drove a Model T Ford, Bill Hammond's father delivered his bread and groceries in another Model T Ford, and Wally Ilott, who was then selling newspapers in what is now the One Stop Shop, had a Railton."*

The Barrington Arms

Jesse Miller, born in 1902, had a brother who drove a Clyno. The Clyno was a rival to Austin and Morris motors but went out of business in the mid 1920s. Jesse's son, Bob Miller, remembered the family dairy farming in the 1930s when his parents lived at Pennyhooks Farm, and taking the milk churns to the station each day.

Len Knapp described Shrivenham railway station in the 1930s:

> *"I would like to indicate how busy the station was in those days. There was an active passenger and goods service; all milk produced in the area was transported to London daily. Since much of this time was before buses and private cars, dozens of people were seen walking to and from the village, both night and morning. We should also remember that coal came by rail, so did bricks, cement, hay, corn and farm produce."*

Les Judd said: *"the coal was delivered at the station and then taken by three full-time coalmen, Mr Enstone, Mr Kent, or Mr Adams, to be delivered on their flat carts with horses to villagers. There was no gas here so people burned solid fuel, coal which was about six bob a hundredweight."*

There was still a thriving business in the London markets for the watercress grown in the spring-line villages around Shrivenham. Drovers still regularly took their flocks of sheep to and from the station and Station Road often resounded to the bleating of sheep as they were driven along the road. Bill Forty's family had a sheep-dipping facility just by the canal in Station Road.

Dennis Stratton spoke of his friends who went to work in Swindon when they first left school. Instead of taking the bus, which cost seven pence each way, they would either walk or cycle to the railway station and get a return ticket for eleven pence, saving three pence.

Lois Plummer's father, Mr Baldwin, was a railway signalman at Shrivenham. Lois recalled that if the weather was foggy, her father would receive a signal from

Swindon to go to Acorn Bridge. There he had to put detonators on the railway line to warn drivers they were approaching a station and to slow down accordingly.

Several people gave graphic accounts of the rail crash just outside Shrivenham Station on 15 January 1936 near Bourton bridge. An express train from Penzance to Paddington collided with some coal wagons that had become detached from an earlier goods train, and the Penzance train rolled over on its side. The driver of the express train and one of the passengers were killed, ten people were seriously injured, and eighteen others suffered minor injuries.

Both Len Knapp and Bill Hammond mentioned that the main road through the village was modified in the late 1920s or early 1930s. At the west end of the village as one leaves for Swindon, a field was cut through to straighten the road and a lovely little house was demolished. This was Miss Reeves' cottage, which stood near the present day bus shelter.

West End, with Miss Reeves' cottage

Len Knapp wrote that once the Swindon Road was straightened, a garage was built by Bob Brickell as a filling station and motor car servicing centre on the hard

standing by the side of the new road. Later, the proprietors were the Tyer brothers and it was known as the Hut Garage. The Tyer brothers had a Terraplane car. Bob Miller described it as *"a great big green car".* The site of the Hut Garage is now occupied by the houses on The Green. Kelly's Directory of 1935 shows Holkham Garage, further along the Swindon Road, being operated by the motor engineers Ilott and Pridham.

Jenny Varney spoke of her father Reginald Knapp:

> *"In 1937 my father Reg bought the site on which Shrivenham Garage stands today and submitted his plans for a garage. Previously this site had been part of the funeral and carpentry business operated by Tom Dike, his son Billy and Rees Kent, who was a very clever craftsman in both upholstery and cabinet making. The plans for the garage were passed and the garage was built in the same year. Kelly's Directory shows Reg was officially appointed to the RAC and the AA as an agent, and he was also a cycle agent. In addition to all this he operated a coach service and regularly transported workers, and later children, between Faringdon, Shrivenham and the outlying villages. During World War II he ran a taxi service. He eventually retired after 40 years' service to Shrivenham."*

The Barringtons

The Barringtons had moved to Rickmansworth Park, a property Lady Barrington had inherited, but she could not settle there and bought back Beckett House when it was available for purchase. They continued to host the Village Fete in their grounds each year.

Lois Plummer described the Annual Fete: *"There was always Maypole dancing by the children, a tug of war, bowling for a pig and always a football match."* Lois as a small child vividly remembered Lady Barrington *"dressed entirely in black, being driven in a black landau with black horses."* Len Knapp remembered Lady Barrington as: *"a prim, slight person, a smaller version of Queen Mary, always dressed in black with a decorative bonnet and veil."*

Lord and Lady Barrington hosting the Old Berkshire Hunt at Beckett House 1930. Permission from Dickie Green

Eve Weston née Stratton recalled:

"I was born in Wisteria Cottage in 1919. I can remember going to the annual Fair in Beckett Park. There were steam engines. I enjoyed the fair with its maypole and fairground music from the steam engines. We had one best outfit to wear on high days and holidays, for instance Easter and Fair Days, with our white daps, white net gloves and straw bonnets.

On a Sunday we had to go to church in the morning and chapel in the evening. My Dad was the village postman on his pushbike and he had been known to cycle from Shrivenham to Ashdown House to deliver the mail. Imagine tackling Ashbury Hill on a bike!!!!

When I left school I worked for Mrs Dance (the Headmaster's wife) and then I was employed at Beckett House working as a kitchen maid for Lady Barrington.

I did not see much of her but when I did see her she was nice. I did tell Lady Barrington, when she asked after the family, that we needed a council house because the cottage was too small with all of the family, six children and two adults in a two up and two down cottage. (There were six children and for a time I had to live with my grandma who lived in a cottage behind the church.)

When I was living with my Granny Danson I was sent to the Crown then owned by the Rolands. No street lights in Shrivenham then, so I carried a jar with a lit candle inside because it was so dark. I went to get a bottle of stout with a sticky label over the top of the beer. Granny Danson walked me back to Beckett House when I was in service with her paraffin lantern to guide us.

Eventually we were given a council house in Stallpits Road. (Whether Lady Barrington used her influence I do not know but it would be nice to think she did.) When I worked in service at Beckett House I lived in one of the rooms at the top of the house in the servant quarters. A story did the rounds that the back stairs used by the servants were haunted. I can remember cleaning out the flues and plenty of washing up.

When Lady Barrington died I went to work in London for Lady Reading but I returned after 14 months in the big city. Then I worked at the College Farm owned by a Captain who may have been called College and from there to Diamond's Farm on the Highworth Road.

When working for Mrs Dance my father bought me my first bike which cost £3. I paid him back a shilling a week out of my half a crown wages.

I can remember Mr Schoffield who sold shoes; Mr and Mrs Warings where the Chinese chippy is now, was an ironmongers.

Growing up in the village there were four cars; (I think) these belonged to Mr Ferryman, Lady Barrington, Dr McNamara and Captain College.

As a child I use to play with a whip and top down the Longcot Road, or ride on a bicycle if one of the children had one. I remember Hammonds where they sold sweets in jars. When we had a halfpenny we bought gob stoppers. When I was 12, I walked to Shrivenham station with my two brothers to go to Weymouth for a day excursion. We took our sandwiches in a brown paper bag. We were joined by other folk from the village. On our return after the excitement of the day, it was a long walk back from the station to the village with two little tired boys."

Iris Hill was a parlour maid at Beckett House for a year in the early 1930s and shared a room on the top floor in the servants' quarters:

"The Barringtons had an impressive list of staff including a cook, kitchen maid, a between kitchen maid, a scullery maid, a butler, two valets, a boot boy, a head footman, an under footman and a second footman. The housekeeper was responsible for a head housemaid, two further housemaids, various lady's maids and parlour maids. In addition to the indoor staff were several gardeners and of course the chauffeur. The servants' livery was navy blue with silver buttons and the butler wore a morning suit. Girls wore navy blue frocks, white aprons and hats during the day. For dinner this was changed to black frocks, white aprons and lace caps. The Barringtons were generous employers and staff were generally happy and contented and felt lucky enough to have good quarters. The butler reminded me on my first night of waiting at the table, "Now, my girl, you'll see all but you'll say nowt."

Lord Barrington died in 1933 and was buried in St Andrew's churchyard. A picture from the Swindon Advertiser shows the cricket team making a guard of honour outside the church at his funeral. This reflects his passion for cricket, especially in the Rec where, according to Lady Barrington, her husband *"knew every blade of grass"*. One of the coffin bearers was Tom Foard, who said it was his *"saddest yet proudest duty to do so"*. Tom Foard captained the cricket team for 32 years from 1900. Lady Barrington died two years later, living just long enough to see her book of reminiscences *Through Eighty Years 1855 - 1935* completed, and Beckett House was once again put up for sale.

Chapter Five: Shrivenham 1937 - 1945

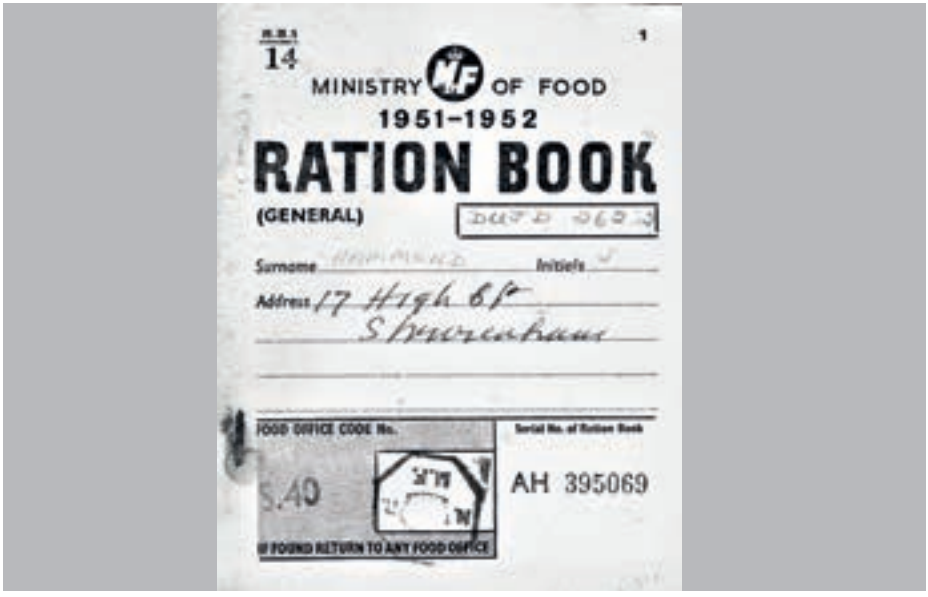
The Beckett Estate is bought by the War Office

In 1937 the War Office, under the Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, bought Beckett House and the remnants of the estate, including Shrivenham House which had previously been the dower house. The estate was chosen as a new site suitable for Anti-Aircraft Training. The reason given was that Shrivenham was one of the few places in the south of England which regularly had clear skies.

Alec Chambers, Mervyn Penny and Les Judd have all spoken of "the ack-ack school's" need to train personnel in anti-aircraft procedures. The barracks, which included the buildings now known as Wellington Hall and Marlborough Hall, were built in Beckett Park to house the officer cadets of the two anti-aircraft batteries of the Royal Artillery which were here for two years. I understand their artillery was shipped out to be used all over the world in the two years before WWII broke out. The contractors, J Knox, recruited men from Swindon as labourers and builders, and Alec recalled them all cycling to work through the village.

The outbreak of war

Before war broke out on 3 September 1939, Britain was heavily dependent on imports, importing about 70% of her food annually. Germany aimed to starve Britain into submission by attacking shipping bound for Britain. To cope with this threat, the Government introduced rationing in 1939. The weekly individual grocery entitlement consisted of two ounces each of cheese, tea and butter together with one egg. Meat was also rationed.



Ration book

Everywhere during the war the policy of "make do and mend" was adopted. Very little was thrown out and almost everything was recycled. In the home, white cotton sugar bags were later washed and turned into handkerchiefs. The occasional rabbit was a real boon to a family when it found its way into a welcome stew or pie. Catherine Gould explained how the rabbits were caught in nets having been chased out of their burrows by ferrets. They were then sold for two shillings and sixpence each.

Avro Anson

Alec Chambers spoke of:

> *"the Flying School established in the area in 1940 and the Ansons, Tiger Moths and Oxford aircraft that were used. Blind flying was practised with what was called the Beam Approach. This was an exciting new development and enabled pilots to fly and land safely at night. The Beam lined up with a beacon on the ground. Chowle Farm on the A420 was one of the landmarks and was fitted with a beacon which I believe is still there today. The approach from there to the airstrip was exactly two miles."*

From late May to early June 1940, the Anti-Aircraft School barracks were used to accommodate soldiers who had been rescued from Dunkirk and brought to Shrivenham by rail. Dennis Stratton recalled that they had nothing but what they stood up in and they trudged the mile or so from the railway station to the barracks to be fed, sheltered and re-clothed before being dispersed to their various bases. (The Dunkirk evacuation had become necessary when large numbers of British, French and Belgian troops were surrounded by German troops and completely cut off. Naval vessels and hundreds of civilian boats were used to evacuate about 198,000 British and 140,000 French and Belgian troops from the French seaport of Dunkirk.) Bill Hammond remembered:

> *"in 1940, as a boy I can remember the many British Expeditionary Force soldiers who had been brought back from France to Shrivenham for dispersal. There were so many of them sitting along the High Street in large groups."*

Joyce Harvey, née Benford, whose family owned Benford's Store, was a very small child at that time.

> *"I remember the sight of the soldiers returning from Dunkirk and how the villagers, touched with compassion at the sight of their condition, found blankets or other coverings to give the men as they walked along the High Street. My father told me later that he was pleased to let them use his telephone to tell their families of their safety. After one man had spoken to his family he*

gave my sister a small, battered book of poems which, he said, had kept him sane in the difficult time before and during the evacuation. My sister always treasured this book."

The Americans come to Shrivenham

The site of the Anti-Aircraft Training School was leased to the American Army in 1942 for the only Officer Candidate School ever established outside the United States. This operated in the village for 18 months.

After the closure of the Officer Candidate School, there were still US servicemen based in Shrivenham. Vic Day, born in 1933 said:

"Americans were still based here from 1943 until 1945 and those servicemen in their dark green trucks brought a breath of fresh air to us in Shrivenham as well as widening our horizons with their talk of dimes, dollars and candy in their unusual accents. One of the reasons the Americans were here was to prepare for the D-Day landings in Normandy which took place in 1944. Using all manner of craft they practised landing by the China Bridge over the lake by Beckett House. I often watched them as they used nets. We only saw the white Americans, for the black Americans were segregated and operated from the back of Ashdown House. The motor transport section used to be close to the old Zebra Camp and there we could see the Blenheims and the Ansons. The Tiger Moth aircraft were kept over at Shellingford. We were experiencing being rationed and life was not exactly easy for us. The Americans were very generous and kindly. They gave us children sweets and biscuits which they called cookies; the men received welcome gifts of cigarettes or tobacco and sometimes the ladies were presented with nylon stockings. They were happy people and I learned a lot about their country so far away."

Alec Chambers recalled that:

"the Americans billeted here before D-Day were not very happy with the English beer and kept asking for whisky, which was in very short supply. My father

reserved it for his regular customers and refused to serve it to the Americans. We knew all the Sergeant Majors as they regularly dropped in to the Barrington Arms. I remember one man in particular who would balance a pint of beer on top of his head and then walk down the length of the pub as far as he could without spilling a drop."

Mervyn Penny spoke of:

"the generosity of the Americans who were living at the time in Beckett House, which was used as a Mess. One December evening during the war, three friends and I were invited to ring our handbells at a party in Beckett House in the hope of raising some cash for the Red Cross at Christmas. The Americans welcomed us in and asked us to play from the balcony. This we duly did with gusto, were told it sounded lovely and were rewarded with sweets, cookies and £30 in cash. One of our handbell ringers, was working at a nearby farm, came from the London area and was a pacifist. By doing farm work he was contributing to the war effort."

Clive Carter, a small boy in the 1940s, also recounts the generosity of the men from the States. He spoke about going with his father and Frank Benford's father to the American base where they were given all sorts of goodies, including peaches and candies for children's parties. He said that this was like manna from heaven to war-torn, rationed Britain.

An American I happened to meet some years ago in Virginia who had been posted to Shrivenham in 1944 remembered the social club for the Air Force Officers. This was in the old railway carriage which then stood in the farmyard belonging to Harold Knapp, opposite the Beehive Cottages.

Shrivenham School

The routine of Shrivenham School was upset by the outbreak of WWII. A large number of children from East Ham in London were evacuated to Shrivenham in September 1939 with their teacher, Miss Sadie Knight, to avoid the anticipated

heavy bombing of their city. The influx of new children necessitated a change of routine until early October. The Shrivenham children were taught in the mornings only, spending their afternoons playing organised games in the Rec, and the East Ham children were taught for three hours in the afternoon from 1.30pm, having played organised games in the morning. In October it was decided to teach the London children in the Memorial Hall and the local children returned to their normal routine.

Vic Simon, an evacuee from the East End of London, recalled how happy he was when he and his little brother were placed with the Dike family who:

> *"made us feel welcome. We soon felt part of the community. Despite this, there was a certain degree of animosity towards the evacuees from the village children.*
>
> *There was one rather amusing incident towards the end of September. The horse chestnut trees in the Rec produced a large number of conkers. One afternoon the boys were enjoying the usual conker games when, for some reason, there was a confrontation with the local lads. Fortunately no-one was hurt but Mr Dance, the school headmaster, was extremely angry and he organised a number of men with carts to remove all the conkers in sight and dump them some distance away. All the lads were highly amused. It was rather interesting that from then on relations between us and the village boys were greatly improved."*

Vic remembered little about the progress of the war in Shrivenham, but did recall the night of 14 November 1940.

> *"That evening there was an air raid warning and there was the sound of many aircraft overhead. We could see them silhouetted in the moonlight and realised they were German bombers. As we learnt later, this was the terrible raid on Coventry."*

There was a Christmas party in the Memorial Hall on 22 December 1939 for 240 children. This of course included the children from East Ham. Sheila Turner,

who started at Shrivenham School in the 1930s, spoke of how the headmaster's wife, together with the American Army, used to organise parties for the schoolchildren. The children were served food on trays with cake and sweets. This food would normally have been rationed and was therefore a great treat.

Along with several other contributors, Tony Bradfield, at Shrivenham School until 1937, spoke of the headmaster's terrible temper and "short fuse". Sheila Turner, who was there about five years later, remembered how the headmaster regularly led exercise sessions in the playground and classroom to keep the children warm on a cold day when the tortoise stove in the large classroom, divided into two, was insufficient for comfort. Both Tony and Sheila spoke of the good education they received. Sheila said she was both literate and numerate when she left school at 14. Tony said Dickie Dance was a wonderful ornithologist and there was very little he did not know about birds. Further, he would take them to football matches in Swindon in his own time. Sheila spoke of how the older children knitted socks and balaclavas for the Forces during the war.

Joyce Harvey mentioned the mile of pennies brought to school by the children to help the war effort. The pennies were carefully placed in a line and the children watched the line grow week by week as they added their contributions. Joyce recalled the party in the Memorial Hall at the end of the war where the children had their first taste of ice-cream and *"were their eyes round with wonder!*"

Gwen Rich, who has lived in Shrivenham all her life, recalled:

> *"the smallpox scare in Swindon in 1942. Only three cases were diagnosed in Swindon but the then Medical Officer of Health decided that everyone in the town should be vaccinated; Dr MacNamara took this very seriously and made the decision to vaccinate all the children in the village. He turned his living room in Elm Tree House into a temporary surgery. Later on, a room in the Memorial Hall served as a surgery for the dentist when he came to do regular checkups of the schoolchildren's teeth."*

During the war, degree courses were postponed indefinitely by some of the universities. This affected Lois Plummer who wanted to go to Liverpool University and had the necessary qualifications to do so. She joined the WRNS instead.

Prisoners of War

Both Vic Day and Peter Anger spoke about the German prisoners of war who were kept at the back of Westmill, close to where the wind farm is today. Housed in a compound, they were guarded by the Military Police. Peter said that *"they were very submissive and had no fight left in them to think of escaping. During the day they worked on the farms. They were given a little freedom, for they were allowed to drink in the local pubs, but had to be back in their quarters by 9pm."*

There were also Italian prisoners of war who were the entire crew of a submarine which had surrendered in the Mediterranean. Bill Hammond spoke of the Italians, who had more freedom than the Germans and lived in various places in the village. In particular he remembered the two who lived in a shed on the adjacent farm. They, like the Germans, helped on the land. Catherine Gould mentioned how her family later kept in touch for a while with their Italians, Lesbo and Gino, as well as with other prisoners of war, Fritz, Ada and Zepp. Sheila Turner recalled the Italian prisoner of war who would walk down Stainswick Lane singing arias from operas as he went to work on the Shepherds' farm at Broadleaze. She remembered seeing the German prisoners of war being marched through the High Street with a big circle on the back of their fatigues, designed to deter them from escaping by making them instantly identifiable.

Christine Carter, from another long-established family in Shrivenham, was told that *"the prisoners of war helped to dredge Beckett Lake. My father, who worked as a signalman on the railway, had spoken of some of the prisoners' activities in their spare time, which included making toys, for he was given a ship in a bottle and a wooden train for his children".* Sheila Turner's grandmother's living room was decorated by Heinrich and another German prisoner. Peter Anger has a lovely watercolour painting of a scene in Beckett Park given to his mother by one of the Italian prisoners who had used a child's paintbox. It remains a treasured possession.

Vic Day recalled:

> *"At school we regularly went to the farm buildings which were situated at the back of Manor Lane. Pam Ilott lived there just before it was pulled down in the 1950s. Remember it was war time and everybody grew their own vegetables. We used to pick potatoes and then the school bus would take us to the Prisoner of War camp at the back of Westmill to deliver these potatoes. In this way we got to know the POWs and we thought one of them, Eric was a nice kind man. One day he showed us his gun which he kept hidden and swore us to secrecy. Because he was a nice guy and we had got to know him we never breathed a word to anyone at the time. Any stranger was suspect in our village but not the POWs."*

Military tailors

Vic Day commented that during the 1940s:

> *"there were 15 or 16 military tailors in Shrivenham. Because of the sheer number of military personnel passing through Shrivenham, it was decided to utilise as showrooms and workshops the scrapped railway carriages from the Great Western Railway at nearby Swindon. All the military uniforms for the officers and men at the barracks were made in the village during the war by tailors from London and Liverpool firms, who employed local people to assist. I remember the tailor's place opposite our home in Park Cottages. It was situated in a railway carriage on Rimble Knapp's farmland, and I believe it was called Walter's Tailor. This carriage was later used as an antiques shop and then as living accommodation for George and Vi Barrett. Rimble Knapp used to sell milk from his farm, and for years had a sign advertising "Knapp's Diary" which caused a smile."*

The local vet was told by an elderly client, years ago, that there was a row of military tailors operating from where the former vets' building stands at Northford, going towards Shrivenham Park golf course. Another military tailor worked from the shop that is now the Chinese takeaway close to the Prince of Wales. Bill Forty recalled a railway carriage used for a similar purpose in Stallpits Road.

In all there were 52 people involved in tailoring which, considering the population was about 800 (the figure is approximate as no census was done in 1941), meant a welcome boost to Shrivenham's economy. The average wage for an agricultural labourer in 1937 was about 30 shillings a week, while a worker in the Great Western Railway Works in Swindon would have taken home about 45 shillings each week.

Other memories from war-time Shrivenham

Bob Miller left school at the age of 14 during the war and went to work for Mr Harris the butcher, whose shop was opposite the Prince of Wales:

> *"After a year I became a delivery boy and could be seen on my butcher's bike with its huge basket over the front wheel, delivering fresh meat to homes in Shrivenham, Bourton and Watchfield. While I received a weekly sum of ten shillings, there was no charge for delivery to the customer. Since offal was not rationed during the war, many people enjoyed liver or stuffed heart or tripe. I later worked in the Fire Service for nine years before working for Captain Colledge at Stallpits Farm."*

Sue Drew mentioned that John Mills, the famous actor, came to train here in the Royal Artillery ack-ack division and lived in one of the thatched cottages in the High Street opposite Stainswick Lane. Edward Heath, later Prime Minister (1970–1974), was also stationed here for a while.

Three residents, boys at the time, have each told of hearing the sound of an enemy aircraft and seeing a German bomber, a Junkers 88, fly so low over the church that it almost removed the weathervane. Bill Hammond recalled that: *"it was returning home after a raid and dropped its excess bombs over the Otters' farm where the men were working at Harvest Cart. Before crashing, the bomber aimed four bombs at them, followed by three bursts of machine gunfire. Fortunately all missed their target. Two bombs exploded on impact but the remaining two had to be defused. A military cordon was quickly thrown around the crashed enemy plane."* The boys said it was quite a thrill to see an enemy plane on fire. The Queen Mary lorries used for transporting aircraft, intact or crashed, were quickly on the scene.

Soon after that incident a Wellington bomber came down on the pig farm which bordered Stallpits Farm and Damson Trees. It was an incredible sight, for the bomber was firmly wedged with each of its wings stuck in a tree. It did not explode or catch fire and no one was hurt.

Vic Day recounted a very sad incident:

> *"How my great-grandmother, with whom I had a close relationship, died haunts me to this day. The whole country was preparing for the D-Day landings and as a consequence there were stacks of ammunition by the roadsides everywhere in the south of England. During the war the College was of course a military centre with lots of tanks that would be used in combat. I'm not sure what happened but my great-grandmother was crushed to death by one of these tanks that rolled over her in the High Street opposite Horne's corner. I shall never forget it."*

Vic's great-grandmother had been trying to protect an eight-year-old boy. I heard later from John Barker, who has lived all his life in Shrivenham, that *"I was the boy in question. She had told me to go to my home in Park Cottages for safety. As I did so, the tank failed to turn the corner and ran into the wall with tragic consequences."*

Dennis Stratton served on convoys in the North Atlantic during the war. He said that he was glad radar had just been invented as, along with ASDIC, this gave the crew some feeling of security.

John Martinson Barker, from another long-established Shrivenham family and father of John Barker, was turned down for active service so he joined the Fire Service and looked after the village. The fire tender was stored in the little shed adjacent to the raised ground by the Memorial Hall and fortunately was rarely needed. Mart, as he was known, was the caretaker to the Hall and took great pride in his duties. Although a youngster at the time, his son John said:

> *"I remember the activity surrounding the D-Day campaign. The vehicles needed for transportation to Portsmouth were hidden one evening between two*

mounds of earth overhung by trees close together, so close that the vehicles could easily be camouflaged. They evaded the enemy eye and before dawn the next morning they were gone."

The liberation of Europe was launched on D-Day, 6 June 1944, with landings from sea at several points along the coast of Normandy. It was the biggest amphibious assault in military history and involved an armada of 7,000 boats of all sizes. About 156,000 troops participated and more than 4,000 British, American and Canadian men lost their lives that day. The landings established an Allied foothold in France, a major turning point in bringing the war to a close.

The well-loved Dr MacNamara, who was widely regarded as a treasure, did not live to see the end of hostilities. He died whilst visiting a patient on 28 April 1945.

Shrivenham railway station

Shrivenham railway station was in a strategic position for the Services. Ambulance trains sent from London at night with the wounded were directed to a special Red Cross siding at Shrivenham, about half a mile in length. The location was ideal for enabling the wounded to be transported to hospitals in the Midlands. The Red Cross provided bandages and other items of medical equipment to make the journey more comfortable.

James Wade, who first came to the College in 1946 and who has known the village for over 60 years, spoke of how:

"men wounded during the D-Day Campaign were flown by ambulance plane to Down Ampney. An ambulance then took us to Shrivenham under cover of darkness. From Shrivenham we were ferried by train to a variety of destinations. I was one of the casualties and I was transferred at Shrivenham to a waiting ambulance train which took me to a hospital in Leamington Spa. Until 1990, when I was researching documents for a medical report, I was wholly unaware that I had first come to Shrivenham in 1944."

Christine Carter's father one day took her along the railway track to see where the trains bringing the wounded servicemen were placed. Christine was a young child at the time but clearly remembered:

> *"seeing carriages each painted with a red cross. Opposite the Victoria pub was a camp consisting of prefabs and Nissan huts. Little roads and tracks linked them like a tiny housing estate. The nursing orderlies lived in this camp."*

Those who didn't return from the war

Shrivenham lost six men in World War II. They were:

Victor Harold Benfield, died 19 June 1943, a flight sergeant in the RAF. His name is on the Honours Board in Shrivenham School. It was the last name to be added before the Honours Board, which sat very high up on the wall, was concealed when the classroom ceiling was lowered. Victor lived in one of the Jubilee Cottages in Hazells Lane, and his father was a signalman on the railway.

Hubert Victor Claridge, died 29 October 1944, the son of Harold Claridge who had returned from WWI with only one arm. The Claridges lived in one of the Trust houses in the Rec. Hubert was remembered in his schooldays as being a happy and kindly boy, the biggest and tallest boy in the school and who would always give "piggy backs" to the smaller children.

Albert James Forty, died 14 September 1944, a private in the Oxon & Bucks Light Infantry, lived in Stallpits Road and was killed in Italy.

Stanley Cyril Judd, died 10 July 1944, whose home was also in Jubilee Cottages, was a contemporary of Dennis Stratton. Bill Forty mentioned that Stanley's sister was Gwen Crawley who in 2012, at the age of 90, was still conducting Keep Fit classes.

Arthur Lionel Boultbee Raven, died 8 July 1940, a pilot officer in the RAF. His family lived at Maytree Cottage in Manor Lane. Arthur's father was at the barracks at the outbreak of war.

George Fitzroy Cordy Simpson, died 18 April 1945. He was Canadian and remembered for coming over the houses in Shrivenham in his yellow training plane. His father worked at the barracks at the outbreak of war. Alec Chambers remembered him well because he kept his horses at the back of the Barrington Arms.

These six men are remembered at the Remembrance Day service each year, together with the nine men who died in the Great War. Their names are read out in the churchyard at the Doulting stone war memorial before the two minutes' silence is observed.

Other families suffered during the war. For example, Nina Buckland's husband was held in a Japanese prisoner of war camp for five years. Several people expressed their sadness at the death of Billie Benford, Frank Benford's brother. He was on sentry duty outside the main gates to the College (then the barracks), when he was accidentally shot by a colleague early one evening as they were keeping guard. Billie was 17. Dennis Stratton said that "*the whole village was stunned by his death.*" In the 1950s, Frank and Margaret Benford took over from Frank's father the bakery and grocer's shop on the corner of Church Walk and the High Street.

Victory in Europe

On 8 May 1945, World War II ended in Europe. Catherine Gould spoke of the village on this day: *"It was such a happy night with lots of laughter. I well remember the big circle of people dancing across the road doing the Okey Cokey and Knees Up Mother Brown. There was so much laughter and happiness in the village now that the war was finally over."* Later that night there was a huge bonfire down at Stainswick Farm. To mark the end of the war, the village schoolchildren were given two days' holiday and every public service was closed.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, rationing and austerity were the norm. Christine Carter told me that her mother was widowed when Christine was a child of ten. From time to time in those bleak days the family would be sent a parcel of food. She had no idea where it came from. Her older brother, Clive Carter, later told me it was but one example of where generously-minded villagers perceived a need.

The parish council agreed on 15 April 1946 that *"any general scheme of jollification would be inappropriate under present conditions"* since not every Shrivenham man had returned from the war, but Mr George Benford thought that *"tea and sports might be arranged for the children."* Two months later on 8 June 1946, every child in Shrivenham School was given a copy of a personal message from King George VI as the country celebrated victory.

Tony Bradfield, who had served in Italy, spoke of the Welcome Home party held in the Memorial Hall on 26 July 1946 for all those who had been on active service and said:

> *"I was taken aback to receive a cheque for £12 together with a certificate of presentation by the Chairman of the Welcome Home Committee. Every returning person received the same, regardless of the length of service."*

Tony later learnt that dances had been run on a business footing, putting the profits to one side for the purpose of helping the returning servicemen settle in again. It was a handsome sum of money in those days when the average take home pay was about £6 per week. The parish councillors at their meeting on 12 January 1944 had unanimously approved a reduction in the hire cost of the large hall used by the Welcome Home Committee for their dances. Mervyn Penny recalled the dances with the Squadronnaires, a top RAF band, and later bands from the American Forces stationed at the barracks. Returning servicemen at the American University also helped swell the Welcome Home party's coffers.

Certificate presented by the Welcome Home Committee to returning service personnel

The Welcome Home Committee was headed by the vicar, Canon Cuthbert Metford. Wendy Pearcey, who grew up in the late 1940s and early 1950s, remembers him as a tall and typically old-fashioned Vicar who knew everybody. He was so tall that he was known as a "high flier". He was a kindly man, although the children at school were greatly in awe of him. Peter Anger remarked on his beautiful voice. Bob Miller remembered that the canon's daughter Liz was educated at home by a governess, and was fond of the goats kept in the vicarage grounds. John Barker remembered her passionate interest in the horses she kept at Beckett Stables, now Northford. She was also known for her singing on the American Forces Network during the war.

The Americans had looked ahead to prepare their servicemen for returning to civilian life at the end of hostilities and planned to have a university here in Shrivenham. This was established, replacing the artillery barracks, and more than 7,400 students studied here in the two academic terms of its existence from October 1945 to May 1946. During the university's short life the students were remembered as happy, cheerful and good morale-boosters who enjoyed the dances held regularly in the Memorial Hall.

The Americans donated money in 1944 for two more bells to be added to the existing ring of six in the church tower. The plaque adjacent to the pulpit in St Andrew's Church reads: *"This panel is placed here by members of the Armed Forces of the United States of America & the British Empire to commemorate their service amongst the people of this Parish."* Catherine Gould spoke of all the schoolchildren going to the churchyard in 1948 to see the bells lying on the ground before they were ceremonially handed over to the church. Catherine described her early life:

> *"I was born to Margery and Harold Knapp early in the war. The family name is almost as old as our village being of Saxon origin. It can mean "a worker in flint" and some of our forebears were stonemasons in Shrivenham in the last 100 years. My father was Harold G. Knapp, known to his friends as Rimbo. He had a small mixed farm, but mainly dairy, in Shrivenham. Milk then was 6d a pint. He had been a tenant farmer for several years and*

this farm, Shrivenham Farm, was part of the Beckett Estate which was sold in the 1920s. My parents happily bought it. My father was also a tenant farmer of some land at the College which is now the golf course, the pasture land that became Arnhem Camp, the Orchard in the Longcot Road and Horse Close which was again part of Beckett Park. Of course this was more than 20 years before I was born. My Uncle Len owned the land where the cemetery is today and Coppidthorne meadow down to the canal. He also kept stock on what is Common Close and Days Ground which was then known as Daisy Ground. We lived in a cottage on the High Street, next door to Bill Hammond's father's shop and adjacent to the farm.

For many years the board outside the farm had written on it "Knapps Diary". My father said it caused amusement and people never forgot it and would come back for more milk or whatever. Having transport on the farm in the form of a Riley 9 car helped us enormously in the days of World War II. However, it had its downside. My father who had seen service in World War I was a sergeant in the Home Guard and being the only one with transport used to take some of the others in his car when they had to go on exercise away from the village. Hence he missed my christening in St Andrew's Church because he was on one of these exercises. Apparently my mother was extremely annoyed.

Our cows were milked by hand and later the cooled milk was put into ten-gallon churns to be collected by Cadels lorries and taken to the Express Dairies in Faringdon. A few people would come to collect their milk in jugs from us straight from the churn. All our weights, measures and scales were regularly inspected and checked by an Inspector in the Men's Institute close by. I sometimes used to help with this and measured out the pint in the jug from the churn. Before the war my father would deliver the milk by horse and cart. In fact cart horses were widely used in the fields because of the difficulty in obtaining anything mechanical. I remember with great affection our huge shires, Diamond and Violet. They really were gentle giants and I frequently had rides on them from an early age.

I learned to hand milk a cow before I was four years old. I'll explain this rather astonishing statement by saying that we had girls from the Women's Land Army to help on the farm during the war. One of them was so slow that one day the cow lay down before she had finished milking her. I begged to have a go for she was just at the right height for me. And was delighted when the milk began to spurt into the pail."

Among the bell-ringers at the time were Peter Anger, John Barker, Vic Day, Ted Anger and Brian Day. John Barker spoke of Peter Anger as a very accomplished ringer who had rung at St Paul's Cathedral in London as well as at Exeter, Truro and Lincoln cathedrals.

The manor house

Shrivenham Manor House, photograph WES Gamblin, personal work

In the mid to late 19th century, the lovely manor house situated behind the school was the home of Amariah Fairthorne, of the Fairthorne and Phillips Brewery in Faringdon. The manor house was later owned by Don Parsons who, in the mid 1930s, was driven in his Sunbeam limousine by Kenneth Allen's father, who came

from a very long-standing village family. Later, Eyre Williams bought the manor house and lived there. A very active member of the community, he was sadly missed by the parish council when ill health forced him to retire.

During WWII the manor house became a hostel for the Land Army Girls who gave so much help on the local farms. Alec Chambers met his future wife among the Land Army volunteers. Another lady also met her future husband while in the Land Army. This was Grace Weston. Although she loved her native Yorkshire she happily spent the rest of her life in Shrivenham.

Chapter Six: Shrivenham 1946 - 1950

Village life in the late 1940s

David Elbrow was born during World War II and still lives in the village. He spoke of :

> *"the happy time in the late 1940s when I lived in Rhymes Cottage next door to Tony Bradfield's family. My father worked for Captain Colledge at Stallpits Farm which was both an arable and a dairy farm. Captain Colledge was a good employer and he and his wife were well respected. After his death his widow continued to farm for a while, helped enormously by the supportive farm workers. Two girls from the Women's Land Army stayed on the farm, and one, Kathleen from Liverpool, later married Tony Bradfield's brother. I remember the huge carthorses and the pleasure I and my friends had as we roamed across the fields, taking with us the friendly farm dogs to the river Cole at Shrivenham's boundary with Coleshill. There was no need to worry about traffic.*
>
> *I recollect the very elderly lady living in the thatched cottage opposite the allotments. This lady was Les Judd's grandmother, and she gave her rationed sweets to the children living nearby. I also remember delivering the rabbits which the farmer had caught on the farm to people who had asked for them. I would deliver them on my way to school. Families welcomed rabbits as meat was still rationed. On reaching school-leaving age I served a five-year apprenticeship with P.G. Hennion the plumber in Shrivenham."*

Jesse Miller became the resident cobbler in Shrivenham. He had decided that he enjoyed mending shoes and boots and that with such a trade he would never be out of work. So he sold Watchfield House and moved to the property just behind Blacksmith's Cottage in the High Street. The forge in the High Street was still active in the late 1940s and early 1950s with horses queuing up outside in the road to be shod. Jesse also operated a private hire car service using his Standard 16 car. His son told me that his father also sold fruit and vegetables. He would select

and weigh up green tomatoes in one-pound bags, place them in a warm cupboard where they would ripen and always be available quickly.

Catherine Gould mentioned that the village children would regularly visit the cinema in a hangar on the airfield on a Sunday night. (This was long before the Bromhead cinema in the college was built. Her husband, John, recalled that soon after it opened, a film about the *Graf Spee* was shown. There was plenty of noise from the action in the film but there was additional action that night when all the newly-placed decorative wall tiles fell off.) Catherine recalled the small circuses that used to stop at Days Ground, known as Daisy Ground.

In 1947, Shrivenham School became a primary school, taking pupils from the age of five up to only eleven. This was the result of the 1944 Education Act, introduced by R.A. Butler, which had raised the school leaving age to 15 and introduced a tri-partite system of education from the age of 11. The 11-plus exam was introduced as a method of selection. The children who would benefit from a more academic education went to the grammar schools, those who would benefit from a technical education went to technical schools, and the remainder transferred to a secondary modern school for more practical subjects. Shrivenham School records show that 30 senior children transferred to Faringdon Secondary Modern School in 1947.

Under the Act, one third of a pint of milk a day was provided free of charge for all schoolchildren. The school records show that consignments of cocoa were delivered from the Canadians for the benefit of the schoolchildren.

The number of pupils at Shrivenham School was increasing in the late 1940s. This necessitated the erection of two temporary classrooms known as the Horsa block. Kenneth Allen, born in Shrivenham and who attended the school from 1943, spoke of his parents Arthur and Elsie Allen:

> *"who used to drive the school bus to take the children of 11 years and over to Faringdon. My parents would then pick up the younger children living in*

the outlying villages such as Ashbury and Kingston Winslow to bring them to Shrivenham School."

Catherine Gould spoke of her schooldays:

"My first schooldays were at Miss Pratt's private school just below Coplow House so I did not have far to walk. Miss Pratt was the daughter of Dr Pratt the eye surgeon in Swindon and the family lived in Coplow House. I was there until the school closed in 1946 when Miss Pratt married an American who was at the college when it was an American University for a short while. I then attended Shrivenham School from 1946 to 1952. Mr Friend was the Headmaster at the time and I recall a particular teacher who lost her temper with us one day and hurled knives, forks and spoons one lunchtime at noisy schoolchildren. I was surprised when this teacher then went on to write a book on how to teach children."

Bill Hammond was called away from the village in 1946 when he was called up under the Duration of Emergency Act. He served in the army for two years, mainly in Burma.

Vic Day who spent many years both as a Parish Councillor and later as chairman of the Parish Council recalled his early days:

"In 1947 I left school. I was glad to leave because I had hated school at Faringdon. I immediately went to work for George Benford who had the grocer's shop on the corner of the High street and Church Walk. When I say immediately, I mean I started work the very day I left school. I was there for over a year and earned the princely sum of £1 per week. I then went to work for Mr Reginald Knapp in his garage. It was while I was there that I decided I wanted to join the Marines. People wonder why I, a lad, born and bred in the country and living in the middle of England so far away from the sea, should have wanted to do this. The truth is that much as I loved Shrivenham and the Vale of the White Horse, I was aware that there was a much bigger

world outside and I was pragmatic enough to realise that I was never going to improve my lot unless I did something about it. I was a voracious reader of history and surprisingly I had turned my attention to a little bit of philosophy. In addition my father had two brothers in the Services of whom one was a Colour Sergeant and the other was a Marine but with a "hail fellow, well met" attitude to life. I was quite impressed when I saw him with his mates in their blue uniforms. In 1948 I went down to Bristol for the sole purpose of joining the Marines. I was examined, advised to put a bit more weight on and to return the following year. This I did, was accepted and spent seven happy years in the Marines.

I reckon our family has a history of working for the College in one capacity or another for a continuous period of 100 years. My great grandfather worked for the Barringtons on their estate. My great grandmother worked in the laundry and my father worked on the brickwork of the new College in the 1930s. When I came out of the Royal Marines I took up the position of fireman and my son is still employed in the same capacity today."

The Military College comes to Shrivenham 1946

From 1944 the Army Council had been considering the post-war training of army officers and recommended that the former Military College of Science at Woolwich, which had been dispersed in 1939 to Bury, Stoke and Rhyll, and later to Chobham, should be brought together again and established at Shrivenham. In the summer of 1946, just after the Americans moved out, the Military College took over the buildings and converted them into the laboratories, lecture rooms and workshops needed by a scientific and engineering college to give young army officers a thorough professional training. Honours degrees were to be awarded by the University of London. In addition to the undergraduate courses, the first Technical Staff Officers' Course assembled at Shrivenham on 9 October 1946. There were also several postgraduate courses. Beckett House became an Officers' Mess. Civilian lecturers and support staff worked alongside Service personnel, and civilian students were later accepted on the courses. The College became the "Royal Military College of Science" in 1953.

In composing its Charter, the College expressed the wish to nurture a harmonious relationship between the College and the village. It was a major employer in the area and provided transport for workers from the surrounding villages. Many Shrivenham families had at least one member employed there in some capacity. At Christmas there was always a party for the children of the staff, which was usually held in Beckett House. Michael Garland-Collins recalled:

> *"the annual Children's Christmas Lectures were open to children of all staff and students. The idea was to stimulate their interest in scientific topics by making the talk fun. The various departments in the College took it in turns each year to deliver a talk. There was a hilarious presentation one year written and masterminded by my father Tam, a retired colonel, who was an Electrical Engineer and who taught undergraduates in the Mechanical Engineering Department about radio signals and radar. He delivered his talk in the days before remote controls were as common as they are today. Research on this topic was being done at the College at the time and the children at the lecture were some of the first to see remote control in action when a talking teddy bear held centre stage, apparently moving of its own volition."*

As well as the Children's Christmas Lectures, members and their families were eligible to join any of a variety of leisure activities under the aegis of the College, and the attractive grounds were open to visitors. Over a number of years, a number of clubs and organisations came into being, such as the Amateur Dramatic Society, Choral Society, Bridge Club and Scottish Country Dancing. There were also many popular sporting clubs, including rugby, football, cricket, hockey and tennis. In bygone days the College grounds used to have at least one specimen of every tree that grew in the northern hemisphere. Malcolm Tombs mentioned the lovely tree called "Golden Rain" or "Pride of India", which was planted to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, when she visited the College in 1964.

High on the list of sporting priorities in the early years of the College was the establishment of a golf course. I understand that Dr John Hawkes, one of the first academics to move to Shrivenham in order to work at the College and whose

family still live in the village, was an enthusiastic participant in the planning process, which also involved well-known golfer Henry Longhurst, who gave advice on the layout of the new course.

Tales from the College over the years are legion. There was the occasion on which the A420 was re-routed. The June Ball took place one year on the same day the undergraduate results were published. The following day, to everyone's surprise, an unusually heavy amount of traffic began to enter the College grounds from the A420 at the lower gate. Cars, tractors, buses, HGVs, vans and motor bikes were to be seen trundling their way along the Mall, their drivers looking faintly bemused, before they exited the grounds through the upper gate. A swift investigation resulted in security staff removing authentic looking home-made diversion notices from the A420 while muttering darkly about students.

Further development of the village

The development of the College brought more people to the village. The 1951 census reflected the expansion of the village, showing a civil population of 1513 people. The growing population gave further impetus to the builders J Knapp and Sons Ltd to continue building houses in Shrivenham. At this time Knapps had their workshop, storage and offices in Vicarage Lane, where the flats are today (on the corner of Vicarage Lane and Hazells Lane). New sewers and water mains were put in after the war. The village was developed with the addition of more council houses in Stallpits Road and, in the north west of the village, Sandhills was built in the 1950s. Since the population was increasing, the policy of providing more police led to the erection of the two pairs of police houses in the Highworth Road. J Knapp and Sons Ltd had built a few houses in Ashbury Road, now Stainswick Lane, before an embargo was placed on building during the war. As soon as this was lifted, Knapps completed their plan of building houses in the south and west of Shrivenham in Sandy Lane, Fairthorne Way, and down the right hand side of Ashbury Road.

Chapter Seven: Shrivenham 1951 - 1960

The 1950s

In the early 1950s Shrivenham was a comparatively quiet village with only a little light traffic. This enabled keen sportswomen such as Catherine Gould and Pat Clauson to play tennis in the road at Horne's Corner in the days before the tennis courts in the Recreation Ground were built. This was no longer possible once the huge car body transporters from Pressed Steel Fisher in Swindon started coming through the village frequently on their way to Oxford in the mid-1950s.

Bill Hammond spoke of how: *"the wall running round Shrivenham House at Horne's Corner was not always the rounded shape it is today. It used to have a sharp right-angled turn and only half the window in the first Beehive Cottage was visible as you approached the bend."* Edna Day confirmed that the wall was modified in 1953 and set back further from the road to provide better and safer driving conditions.

Not everyone spoke with loving nostalgia of the village then. Rosalind Hambridge came to Shrivenham just before she married in the early 1950s. She regarded the village *"as a dead hole and very little happened."* However, she did remember one night in 1952 when there was an enormous amount of activity. She and some friends were walking in Damson Trees, which was then pasture land and supported a pig farm. Ros and her friends suddenly became aware of a huge fire to the north of the village and could see flames. It was the night on which the lovely old house at Coleshill, designed by Inigo Jones, burned to the ground. Ros said, *"It was found that one of the builders working on the house had left a blow torch on during his lunch break and this had started the fire. As if this was not enough we suddenly saw that there was another fire - this one was at Stallpits Farm. There were so many fire engines that night."*

The farmers in the area were starting to use pesticides for their fields in the early 1950s. Up until the middle of the century most crops had been grown in the traditional manner, using very few chemicals. The countryside was full of birds

and the cornfields had many wild flowers. Corn was cut in sheaves and straw was stacked in traditional haystacks. Tractors were a common sight, with the Fordson and Massey Ferguson's TE20, known as the Little Grey Fergie, replacing the horses. There were no yellow fields of oil seed rape and few blue fields of flax. Here the fields were mainly of potatoes, wheat and barley.

In the home, black and white television sets were becoming available for a few, just in time for the Queen's Coronation in 1953. Penny Partridge recalled how:

> *"all our family flocked to our grandfather's house to watch the Coronation and afterwards we all went to the Memorial Hall where there were some organised games on this happy but wet day. The landlord at the Crown placed his TV set in such a way that children could peer in through the window and watch the Coronation, and Bob Pound kindly installed a television set at the Memorial Hall so that villagers could watch the events in London from there. Bob had a radio and electrical shop in Swiss Cottage on the Faringdon Road junction with Northford, which was where the family lived then."*

Celebrations at the College included a huge ox being roasted on a spit, and Catherine Gould remembers the resulting "sumptuous" slices of beef. A car was raffled that day at five shillings a ticket and it was won by someone from the College.

Dickie Green of Bishopstone said that an almost unnoticed arrival at Shrivenham railway station occurred on 23 July 1954. As a small boy he remembered standing on the railway bridge to see Her Majesty the Queen alight onto the platform before being taken to Bourton to Pinewood School which was then being considered for the young Prince Charles.

Shrivenham lost its railway station after the Beeching Report of the early 1960s. The passenger side was closed in 1963 and the goods facility was closed a year later.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Memorial Hall hosted a very popular weekly ballroom dance. Harry Smith and his Broadcasting Band played every

Saturday night and became known as the resident band at the Memorial Hall. They concentrated on the strict tempo dance music favoured by Victor Sylvester. Malcolm Barrett was a young man at the time and recalled that:

"No jiving was allowed - the band would stop playing if the dancers started to jive - for it was the time of the foxtrot, waltz and quickstep. The dress code was enforced. All the men had to wear a suit and tie otherwise they would be refused admittance. Nan MacGregor was employed as the cloakroom attendant for these evenings. Knapp's coaches collected the eager would-be dancers from the surrounding villages and returned them suitably exhausted at the end of the evening."

Malcolm's father, George Barrett, was employed for more than forty years at the College after returning from service in World War II. At one time George was the caretaker for the Memorial Hall, cutting the grass as well.

Vic Day described his life on leaving the Marines:

"In November 1958, my seven years with the Marines were coming to an end and I thought very seriously about settling down into a more regular way of life in Shrivenham and so I decided to leave. It was not an easy decision for I had thoroughly enjoyed my time. I considered the effect on Edna whom I'd married in 1956 in Shrivenham Church. That was a lovely day and Edna's friends and family came down from Dudley in a specially hired coach – about 50 of them. At the time of this big decision we had our first baby, Nicholas, and I wanted to be with them. Nick had been born while I was in the Marines and I still remember the sergeant yelling the good news to me; "Happy. You've got a son. Get yourself some leave". I still remained on the Reserve list for a further ten years.

When I first returned to live in Shrivenham permanently I had a variety of jobs. In the Marines I'd been getting about £10 a week and the wages at first were only £7 each week but it was worth it to be with my family. I worked for Col Ray Niven as a gardener and groundsman for the Beckett estate at RMCS.

I later spent a year as a pipe fitter's mate at Hennion's in Swindon and became aware of the some of the extreme political views that were doing the rounds at the time. Thames Conservancy advertised for a banksman who would help clear by hand all the streams that fed into the river Cole. It involved standing in water for about seven hours each day. I was bare-chested, even in winter and I can honestly say that I've never been so fit as when I worked there. Food tasted so good too. We cleared from the thick end of the river to the source. I remember stopping at Kingston Winslow where my grandfather had built the water wheel and looking at the field where some of my ancestors are buried. The cress beds at Bishopstone looked healthy. It was while I was working as a banksman that we experienced one of the coldest winters on record. Parts of the River Thames froze over and the smaller River Cole and Bower Brook were also under ice. It was sad to see birds dead on the banks and foxes too for that matter."

The need for new housing

The shortage of housing after the war led to at least two of the military tailors' railway carriages being made habitable. Christine Edwards described:

"After our wedding in 1954, we moved into our first home which was the railway carriage at the top of what is now Catherine Close. The carriage stood in Rimble Knapp's farmyard and had all its original windows. He rented the carriage out to us at eight shillings a week. We lived there for about two years and were very happy there. The carriage had been completely stripped of all the railway furniture; it was a bit like a caravan. There was room down the end for our bed and wardrobe. The sitting room was separate and we had our three-piece suite and chairs and a table arranged. The whole carriage was kept warm because we had a little combustion stove in the sitting room with a pipe connected to and through the roof to allow the smoke to escape. I used to clean this stove with black lead polish. Our toilet facilities were a little more primitive. While we had a washbasin, the loo was situated outside - it was a bucket which my husband had to take to Longcot Road and dig a hole in order to empty it each morning. In the fullness of time Linda arrived – she was a lovely baby. We had a pram with a detachable body so that the wheels could be

stored outside. It was quite an effort lifting the main part of the pram up the steps into the carriage and eventually this was the reason for our move. As I said, we were very happy there but I did find the condensation which dripped on to the furniture and bedding bothersome. It was not good for a young baby.

To the left of the railway carriage was the Dairy which was also used as a betting shop, after which it was used as an antiques shop by Mrs Berry-Benton and her friend. It was a whitewashed building adjacent to Coplow House."

The tale of this solid teak carriage has a happy ending. On 29 August 1974 it was transported to the London Transport Museum for restoration where it was later recognised as a unique survivor and carefully restored. In 2013 it was part of London Transport Museum's 150th anniversary celebrations and ran on the Circle Line where it had started its working life.

In the 1950s, another railway carriage stood in a garden in Stallpits Road and Jean Mosley, granddaughter of the Great War veteran Harold Claridge, remembered the elderly lady who lived there, Mrs Margetts.

The original almshouses in Claypits Lane (built in 1641) had been condemned in the 1930s as being unfit for human habitation. Canon Hill, who died in 1931, had left in his will a largish sum to the Almshouses Trust for the re-building of the almshouses to make them habitable. Legal advice was that in order to comply with the terms of Canon Hill's will, the houses had to be completely re-built. The Trust did not have sufficient funds to do this. Lady Barrington had realised that the Trustees had a legal problem and so gave the land in Martens Road to enable new almshouses to be built. The embargo on building during World War II had prevented her wishes from being carried out and it was not until 1955 that the new almshouses in Marten's Road were constructed. The original almshouses with their earth floors and outside privies were then sold for about £75 each. In the intervening period Wendy Pearcey mentioned that squatters had made use of one or two of the condemned homes.

Helen Taylor, daughter of Len Knapp, spoke of how in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the family firm continued to build in the village. Shortly after the houses and bungalows in Damson Trees were built, the houses along Charlbury Road, Cowleaze Close and Chapelwick Close went up. They were built by the building firm Bradley, and consequently known as the Bradleys. The houses in Martens Close were built in 1964. In the mid to late 1960s the manor house was demolished and the houses in Manor Close appeared.

Four thatched cottages in Hazells Lane were demolished and replaced by four redbrick bungalows in the early 1960s. Bill Forty, who had once lived in one of these charming old cottages, owned by the Prince family, was one of the men employed by the builder, Mr Brickell, to pull them down.

The old cottages in Hazells Lane

While the new houses were being built, Peter Anger was regularly employed in re-thatching the older properties of Shrivenham:

> *"I started my life-long work by going out with my father, also a thatcher, in days when I was not at school, and joined him in his work full-time once I had*

left school. Among our customers was Oxford University which then managed Stainswick Farm and to which we had to submit our bills. It was important that only the straw from the long corn was used for thatching. Shorter lengths of corn went to make corn dollies and the rest, the chaff, was fed into the machine that cut up the mangolds into small pieces and the resulting mass was fed to the cattle as winter fodder.

As I worked, I took great pleasure in watching when I could some of the most famous steam trains as they thundered down the railway line near the village. The Bristolian, the Cheltenham Flyer and the City of Truro all made regular appearances along our stretch of the track."

Catherine Close was built later during the 1970s. Originally the land had formed a part of Rimble Knapp's farm. He had sold it on the understanding that the close was named after his daughter Catherine.

Village shops

In the 1950s, there were many more shops in Shrivenham than there are today. There were three grocers: Dike's Store, Benford's and Bill Hammond's grocery shop. Bill's shop continued until later in the next decade, when he noticed that more supermarkets were coming to the towns and decided to close the business, fearing that small shops were doomed. There were two haberdashers, four pubs, two garages, a newsagent and tobacconist, a cobbler, and a post office.

One of the haberdashers served as a chemist in addition to selling knitting wool, cottons and fabric. Edna Day, who came to live in Shrivenham as Vic Day's bride in 1956, described the shop*: "One had to climb steps to the chemist which, at that time, was situated in the High Street in the front room of one of the houses for disabled men."* Edna also recalled the old post office, which remained adjacent to the Men's Institute until 1963, as *"somewhat gloomy but efficient."*

In the late 1950s the self-service Co-op appeared. It was joined in the early 1960s by the dispensing chemist, now the DIY store. The bank continued to be operated

from Bill Hammond's house next to the Crown public house and Wendy Pearcey remembered: *"the bank clerks still bringing in on the bus the money needed for any transactions in their briefcases, which were chained to their wrists. The bank moved to its present position near the Co-op in 1964."*

Wendy Pearcey, whose family lived in Maytree Cottage in Manor Lane in the 1950s, with a garden extending to the High Street, adjacent to the Methodist Church, remembered being told that two lovely thatched cottages existed on the land now occupied by the Co-op and other shops, and that the cottages had been pulled down before the war.

The Methodist Church

In 1961 it was necessary to widen the A420 through the village and to install a footpath. To do this, Berkshire County Council needed to use some of the land of the Methodist Church. In return for this, the Council built a retaining wall and the wider steps we know today.

Methodist Church 1969, Tony Belk

Joseph Knapp was the chapel's first organist. He was only ten years old when he began to play regularly. He was followed by Nellie Penny, Mervyn Penny's mother, who continued to play for services until she was 98. Together these two organists covered a period of about 110 years unbroken regular playing.

A last word

The 2011 census shows the population for the civil parish to be 2,347. When the Defence Academy population is added it brings the total to about 5,500. This figure represents an increase in the number of people living in our area to about six times the size it was in 1901.

> *"The world has changed, Shrivenham has changed somewhat, but the underlying help and care is still here in our village."*
>
> ***~ Michael Garland-Collins***

Appendix

The following extracts are from an interview with Dr Ian Hurle (ex-resident and ex-pupil of Shrivenham School between 1940 and 1943, now living in Chester) and David Boobyer, who has kindly given his permission to reproduce the text here. The full transcript may be seen in the Heritage Centre in the Memorial Hall.

What was that story you told me about Bob Hope and the Prince of Wales pub?

Bob Hope and Frances Langford came by car from the Swindon direction and pulled up at the Prince of Wales for them to see the village and have a drink. Mr Childs was landlord then. They were on their way to entertain the American troops in Becketts, so it must have been late 1942, 1943 time – certainly before D-Day.

How true is the idea that rural life was a lot safer then? Was life really better/safer/cleaner in the "old days"?

There is no question that life in the village felt very safe – apart from the wretched Germans – and I do not recall hearing of burglaries, assaults, vandalism etc. The worst happenings were things like stealing fruit, riding bikes in the blackout, trying to get someone else's sweet coupons, shooting the odd rabbit or pheasant for the pot etc. I do not recall seeing trouble or overt police presence anywhere. Without hesitation or question and, although under the constant wartime threat, life was uncomplicated, happy, adventurous and friendly and, because of wartime events – exciting.

I do recall one act of gross vandalism! An RAF trailer carrying the remains of a Junkers 88 (shot down the other side of Swindon and en route to Goering's graveyard at Morris Cowley) pulled up at the Prince of Wales. In the time it took the driver to have a pint, most of the movable pieces of the aircraft were cut or torn off and taken away as souvenirs. There was not a lot left when the driver came out of the pub. I had one of the landing lights and a piece of the main spar. Someone staggered off carrying the whole fin with the Swastika on it but these were seen to be more as a right than stealing.

And the role of the village bobby? Was there much crime?

The village bobby – I think he was Sergeant Lyford who lived in one of the first houses on the right going into the village from the Swindon end. There was, of course, a huge – for the size of Shrivenham – police station, with the air-raid siren mounted on top. What was in such a large building was a bit of a mystery, outside, there was a big and fascinating notice board displaying the dangers of booby traps, like the butterfly Bomb, and other, to me, most fascinating gadgets.

There have been a vast number of physical changes since you were a child here. What for you are the most noticeable? Has *the village changed dramatically? For better or worse?*

The amazing thing to me are the few (if any) changes that have been made to Shrivenham in 60 years – outside of the main housing developments at the Swindon end, Ashbury Road, Station Road and those of the old Manor and Rectory. The main street looks exactly the same. The shops on the left opposite the old blacksmith's – run by "Grump" Tucker when he wasn't "inside" – are completely new, most convenient and attractive. The school carries countless unchanged features and they have even preserved Old Dance's whipping desk and chair!! It all looks so happy now that the old ogre is not looming over us – but I don't wish to disparage all that he stood for, which was teaching us to understand nature, the countryside and England. Apart from the stocks at the Cross Trees, the beneficial new bypass, the tidy and welcome shops up by the chapel and the modernisation of the school, there has been surprisingly little change. I think Shrivenham Parish Council, the Headmistress and other public-minded persons are due for a round of applause in these respects.

You mentioned "The Dig for Victory" campaign. Was the area more or less self-sufficient in terms of food?

Everyone was encouraged by the Government to Dig for Victory (the allotments were well worked) or to keep a pig. All in all, I would imagine the area was fairly self-sufficient, foodwise. Tractors were not plentiful (horses were) and the old

reaping and binding machines, together with the elevator, had yet to be replaced by the combined harvester.

Do you have any memories of any shops that have disappeared?

There were a set of kind of "shop" up the side of the Prince of Wales, but they were more like prefab huts housing the tailors Burberrys, Alkits, Moss Bros, etc, there to fit out the cadets from the OCTU at Becketts with uniforms when they received their commissions. The Burberry's men used to lodge with us in the Memorial Hall. Staff came to the shops from London only for one or two days each week.

Were home deliveries/personal service more popular? If so, who would deliver to the door?

There were certainly no supermarket shops. Home deliveries were unheard of. I think everyone relied on these few shops – there were a couple more at Watchfield if one ventured that far afield. I don't think people journeyed as far afield as Swindon or Faringdon to shop other than for clothes, shoes etc, but did go there to enjoy a restaurant or cinema. There were not that many buses and few people had cars or if so were lucky enough to get more than a little of the rationed petrol. I don't recall anyone ever going to Oxford – it was the other end of the world to me.

The railway station is quite a long way from the centre of the village. Was it a busy station? If not for commuter traffic, how was it used?

True, it is a long way from the village but it was a hive of activity in the war. Because there were so many servicemen in the area it had its own RTO (Rail Transport Office) where travel warrants were issued for servicemen going on leave. There were lots of trains stopping and going to and fro. Platforms on each side of the rail were quite crowded when trains were due. The main part of the station was on the Shrivenham side. There were massive coal yards to service the whole area. Coal went thence by local lorry all over the place. When the ambulance/hospital sidings were built in advance of D-Day the station was enormously busy, coping

with the many trains arriving from the various Channel ports. I don't think anyone used the station much to commute (buses did for that) –it was more useful if you were "going somewhere" – although the service to Swindon was reliable and quick.

The bus service nowadays is terribly infrequent. How good was it then?

The bus went back and forth Swindon to Faringdon all day – hence say every two hours. They were always very full and reliefs were often run. The bus went to Swindon via South Marston and Stratton. On the way it passed the Short's Aircraft factory and airfield (now Honda). Each night a Short Stirling bomber was assembled there – the engines and other small parts were made up the Highworth Road at Sevenhampton in the sheds with serrated roofs, and taken to South Marston. When our school bus arrived the four-engined bomber could be relied upon to be being towed across the road into the airfield for a test flight and thence, if OK, immediate delivery to a bomber station. These tests and delivery were made with a crew of just one lady ferry pilot – it was unnerving to watch her walk out and climb up the ladder into the huge aircraft on her own.

What would you say were the main differences between school/teaching today to when you were at school? Better or worse, or just different?

I would summarise the main differences to be the provision of equipment and facilities. The computer facilities are an eye-opener. The many other visual aids must be most useful. The playgrounds are much the same, I applaud the retention of hopscotch. There seem to be more children, all nicely dressed, clean and tidy, unlike the rabble we were (the boys wore anything – including Dad's shortened long trousers).

However, as regards the general standard of education in schools then and today, I am able (by way of the tuition I have given to children in Physics and Mathematics over the past 20 years) categorically to say that the level we were educated to at eleven years of age - for the 11 plus exam – was equal to that of the GCSE level of today, while today's A levels are around the standard of the old O level of 15/20 years ago.

What was your father's official position and for how long was he in charge?

My father was moved by the Army from the Warminster/Devizes area up to Shrivenham in 1940 to prepare and look after the recreation grounds in the Shrivenham Barracks (now the Military College of Science but then an OCTU - Officer Cadets' Training Unit). Somehow Shrivenham Parish Council got in touch with him to look after the Memorial Hall Recreation Ground in return for living in the upstairs flat and also becoming its caretaker. We, as a family, thus took up living in the Hall in 1940 and remained there until 1945. My father's duties were to generally take care of all the facilities, the cricket pavilion, the Saturday night dances and attend to the central heating – as well as maintain the recreation ground for its associated uses. Foremost among these was the cricket table which he made for the Army to play on and the village to use. It offered the Army a far better pitch and surroundings than those available at the barracks for their Interservices matches.

How about clubs and societies – cubs, scouts, Guides, gardening clubs, sports clubs the local Hunt, talks, lectures etc?

As regards clubs and societies etc using the Hall, I do not recall any, apart from the Home Guard and Army Cadets. We had no cubs or scouts – the war was enough. You could join the cadets at eleven years.

Do you remember films being projected in the main Hall?

Films now are a different matter. The Hall was used extensively for films that were produced by the Ministry of Information and these were good value, propaganda as they may have been. The Hall was usually crowded with kids sitting on the floor; I recall it being most cosy, Dad stoked up the furnace and drew the blackout curtains. The film I recall vividly was of the German planes shooting up our fishing boats in the North Sea – in the early days – and later of course, El Alamein.

Was there any military use for the Recreation Ground? I think you mentioned trenches.

Slit trenches were about 5 ft deep by 2 ft wide and 7 ft long dug round the edge of the Recreation Ground on the war-wounded houses side of the chestnut avenue. They all faced inwards towards the centre of the Rec and were to be used as machine –gun and rifle emplacements should German paratroops or gliders land on the Rec. They were used either for the kids to play hide and seek or for mock battles between the Home guard and the Army cadets. Other Defensive Mechanisms? I can only recall the pill-box machine-gun emplacement on the corner ground with the shed. It was solid concrete and positioned to fire up and down the main road. Incidentally the shed was an auxiliary fire station housing a huge portable hose on wheels with an engine to pump the water.

You mention that German POWS worked with your father on the sports grounds. How were they guarded? Did they ever try to escape? How were they treated by the villagers?

They were not as free to come and go as were the Italians. They were guarded by the Military Police and kept in a wire-enclosed cage at the far eastern side of the College site at the Longcot end. I don't recall them ever getting into the village like the Italians did. The Italian POWS were the entire crew of a submarine that had surrendered. They used the Cross Trees for a gathering and singing place at night. They worked on the farms but where they actually lived I never knew. Village girls seemed to like them, though!

The Village Now

by Vic Day

The thatch is gone, the tiles are here,
insurance is so very dear.
The elms long gone, their splendour lost,
the wood on bonfires in piles tossed.
The horse no longer pulls a cart,
more often ridden by a lady smart.
The summers shorter, the winters less cold,
tales by lamplight no longer told.
The wind of change, a breeze no more,
more like a gale blowing all before.
The boundaries changed, we are Oxon now,
the Royal accolade gone, it's quite a blow!
The coffee mornings bring an article made,
(the one last week, it never paid).
The "Sloane Rangers" outside the village shop,
the village Bank to which they "pop".
The smith is dead, the forge is cold,
(the place is a chip shop now, I'm told).
The Play School in the village hall,
the children have a real ball.
The new estates, with houses grand,
the Lord of the Manor never planned.
The mortgage is a real worry,
the husband will not repay in a hurry!
The characters gone, they were so kind,
the like of them we'll never find.
The pseudo-countryman is fashion now,
(the hand that never touched a plough).
The story's told —I've been a bore,
the evening's cold—I'll close the door.

© Edna Day

Acknowledgements

Without the following people this project would never have come to fruition and the collective memories kept for posterity. My sincere thanks go to:

Kenneth Allen
Cheryl Anger
Peter Anger
Phyllis Anger
John Barker
Annie Barrett
Malcolm Barrett
Tony Belk
George Benford
Sylvia Berry-Benton
David Boobyer
Tony Bradfield
Angela Brickell
John Brierwood
Bernard Butler
Christine Carter
Clive Carter
Alec Chambers
John Cherry
Pat Clauson
John Clements
Sue Colyer
John Comley
Alice Day
Edna Day
Vic Day
Joe Dixon
Sue Drew
Christine Edwards
David Elbrow
Tom Foard
Bill Forty
Michael Garland-Collins
Catherine Gould
Dickie Green
Sarah Green
Ronald Guyon
Rosalind Hambridge
Keith Hamilton-Morris
Bill Hammond
Joyce Harvey
Pat Hawkes
Iris Hill
Gordon Hughes
Ian Hurle
Pam Ilott
David Jenkins
Tony Jones
Les Judd
Len Knapp
Reg Knapp
William Knapp
Carrie Lock
Neil Maw
Nan McGregor
Bob Miller

Madeline Moon
Jean Mosley
Alice Partridge
Penny Partridge
Wendy Pearcey
Mervyn Penny
Lois Plummer
David Pratt
Nan Pratt
Gwen Rich
Ian Robson
Florence Ryder
Roy Selwood
Vic Simon
John Simpson
David Stocks
Dennis Stratton
Harold Taylor
Helen Taylor
Jim Tilling
Pam Tilling
Sheila Turner
Jenny Varney
Frank Venables
James Wade
Joyce Walters
Bjorn Watson
Eve Weston
Grace Weston
Mr Wheeler
Paul Williams
Peter Yoxall

I am grateful to the Shrivenham fete committee for their donation towards the cost of printing.

I have tried to keep a record of all those who have helped me in this endeavour. If I have inadvertently omitted anyone, I hope they will forgive me.

Bibliography

Barrington, Charlotte Mary Stopford, *Through Eighty Years (1855–1935): The Reminiscences of Charlotte, Viscountess Barrington,* published J Murray, 1936

Bavin, W D, *Swindon's War Record,* prepared for Swindon Town Council, 1922

Child, Mark, *Discovering Church Architecture: a Glossary of Terms*, published Osprey, 1976

Evening Advertiser, 20 October 1922

Hammond, Nigel, *Rural life in the Vale of the White Horse 1780–1914*, published Wm Smith, 1974

Kelly's Directory, 1935

Knapp, Len, *Shrivenham Between the Two World Wars,* (a personal recollection).

RMCS College Journal, 1996

Sutton, Mark, *Tell Them of Us,* published Melvyn McKeown, 2006

Venables, Frank, *Only Two Girls Can Write,* 2014

Williams, Alfred, *Villages of the White Horse,* published Nonsuch Publishing 1913

Wilson, R H, *Just for a Lark,* self-published, 1970

A Brief History of the Methodist Church in Shrivenham, unattributed.

The Viscountess Barrington's Village Homes and Welfare Institute for Disabled Ex-Servicemen in Berkshire, (Annual Reports), 1922 & 1930

This collection of reminiscences describes the village during the first part of the twentieth century. Residents recall Shrivenham before streetlights and piped water, the prisoners of war who were set to work in the village and the fate of a salvaged German bomber left outside the Prince of Wales while the driver of the transport lorry enjoyed a refreshing pint.

Produced by Serco Media & Graphics at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Serco, the UK-based international infrastructure management company has a long and successful association with the armed services. Serco provides many of the infrastructure services at the Defence Academy of the UK, formerly RMCS Shrivenham, and we are happy to support local community projects by providing professional expertise.

serco Media + Graphics

sercomedia@da.mod.uk 01793 785450

1411-2556