

The Garage Site – Shrivenham High Street

A look at its history – By Neil B. Maw



The old garage in Shrivenham High Street. It stands directly opposite the school in the centre of the village. It is shown in the above photo as the large white building on the left. Its original construction was brought about by the advent of the motor car at the beginning of the 20th century. But for now, we can trace the history of the site back 180 years.

The census of 1841 listed James Birchall and his wife Ann at Beckett House. (James Birchall himself, spelt his name Birchall. Vestry Meeting 22/4/1879. N359). The reason he was there was that he had been working on the building of the new Beckett House that began in October 1829. He was listed in one of the documents as the Head Carpenter. (See SHS N376). The house was not officially declared as completely finished until 1850. It's likely that James Burchall had been invited down from the north specifically for that job, and subsequently never returned.

James came from Congleton in Cheshire and Ann from Scruton in Yorkshire. They were married at St Helens in October 1827.

The Tithe Survey of 1844 listed James Burchall and William Luker at the garage site location in the High street. We learn from later information that listing number 186 as seen below, consisted of two cottages and a builder's yard. The whole property was owned by the Barrington Estate and in 1844, William Luker occupied the cottage on the east side (Today No 29) and James Burchall occupied the cottage and yard on the other side (No 31).



The Shrivenham census for 1851 showed James and Ann together with no children. His occupation was described as a builder. The position within the order that the commissioner walked concurred with the tithe survey of 1844. He must have been a builder of good repute because when the decision was made to build a new chapel at Watchfield, he was chosen to do the job. The foundation stone was laid by Lady C. Berens, the wife of Rev. Edward Berens, Vicar of Shrivenham, on 18th May 1857, and James Burchall erected it ready for consecration on 4th March 1858.



The Chapel of St Thomas at Watchfield circa 1905. Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

By studying the photograph below, part of the builder's yard can clearly be seen before the new vicarage was built. There is also a closer look at it later below. The garage went on to occupy the western end of the yard and replaced three small cottages - more on them below.

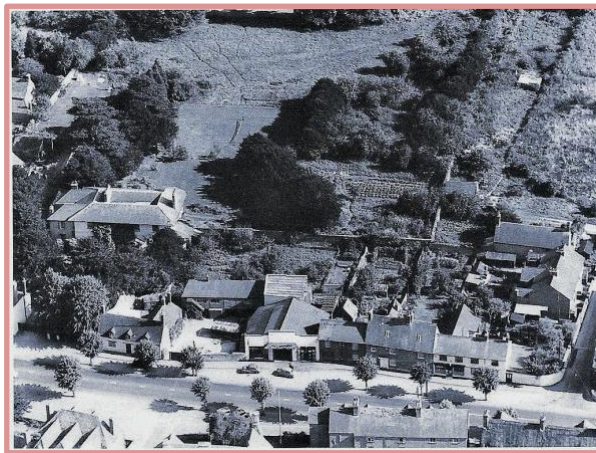


Photo circa 1950s

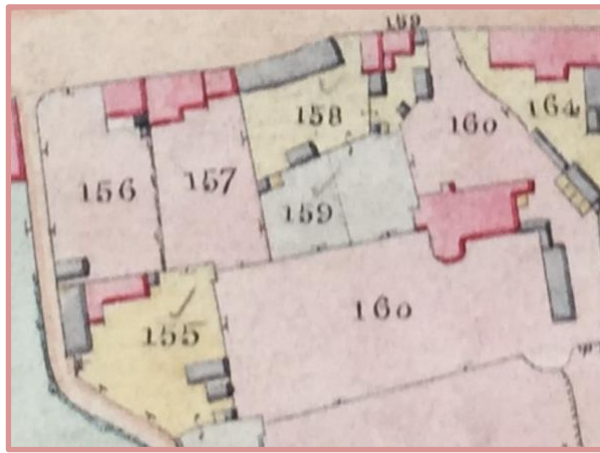
The next census of 1861 showed that James and Ann still had no children but a niece, Maria Scaife had joined them. James was busier than ever as he was contracted to build the new National School, literally just over the road on the site of a building that was known as Courtney Cottage. (SHS N887 - Memoires of Augusta Barrington). This building was described as a '*six gabled house*,' by local man, Bill Knapp's father. (SHS N661) However, his memory was a little

bit shaky about who built the new school. The Memorandum of Agreement was for James Burchall, in conjunction with brothers, Alfred and George Honeybone, Stonemasons, to erect a School and Master's House for £91.10.6. (SHS N421). The Honebone's Yard was located where the old Lloyds Bank and Florist shop are today.



The National School and Master's House built in 1862/3

By looking at the Barrington Estate Map below of 1866, we get more information of the layout of the buildings at this location. The first cottage numbered 159 was occupied by Robert Luker. The block numbered 158 was occupied by James Burchall, the red building being a residential cottage (Today No 31 High St) and the black building being of commercial use (Demolished). The census described James as a, '*Carpenter and Builder.*'



The census of 1871 doesn't mention Ann, but this could be that she just wasn't there when the census Commissioner called. But Maria is listed as the housekeeper for James. However, Ann is listed in the Parish Burial Register that she was interred in St Andrew's churchyard on 11th July 1875, aged 82. The following census of 1881 showed that James was still alive and described as a Builder employing one man, and he had a lodger with him called Thomas Boucher. The position in both census' confirmed that the property location was still the same. James passed away in 1884 aged 79 and was buried in St Andrew's churchyard on 29th November.



Nos 29 & 31 High Street, Shrivenham

Thomas Boucher who was a lodger with James Burchall, was still in the cottage according to the 1891 census. (Today No 31 High St). His wife Emma was listed with him along with a boarder called Elizabeth Archer. Thomas was described as, *'Living on his own means,'* which suggests that he had no need to work. But sadly, later in the decade, both of them died within a few months of each other. Thomas was buried on 1st February 1897 (aged 70) and Emma was buried on 8th May (aged 68), both in St Andrew's churchyard, Shrivenham.



It's at this time that a man called Rees Kent who had been in Shrivenham since 1885, took over the occupation of 31 High Street and the yard and buildings next to it. The census for 1901 listed him with his wife Kate, and he is described as a, *'Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer.'*

But just before then an incident took place that would provide us with a lot more information. The Faringdon Advertiser dated 5th August 1899, carried the story; *'The cry of fire alarmed the villagers on Saturday evening last. The alarm was raised by Mr Jefferies of Pennyhooks, who, on driving through the village, saw smoke going up from the back part of Mr Hackshaw's shop. The long-thatched building, formerly used as a carpenter's shop, has been for some time divided into three holdings. The first part next to the gateway was used by Mr Rees Kent,*

cabinetmaker, the centre premises being occupied by Mr Hackshaw, harness maker, and the other portion was used as a butcher's shop by Mr G. Pepler. Mr Hackshaw and Mr Rees Kent live in the adjoining houses the other side of the gateway. The local village policeman, P.C. Sparkes, investigated the cause of the blaze and was highly suspicious of John Hackshaw and arrested him. He was subsequently tried for arson with the intent of falsely claiming the insurance money, but the case was thrown out through lack of evidence.

The newspaper article provided the information that this long building was once a Carpenter's workshop, used no doubt by James Birchall and Thomas Boucher respectively. But it seems that it was Rees Kent who turned the building into three units. The nearest one to his house (No 31) he used as a workshop, the middle one he let to John Hackshaw, Sadler, but he used the room above it for storage, and the newspaper advert below, shows that he turned the third one into a Butcher's shop just a year earlier. It was also mentioned that there was an old sawpit. It is very likely that the three shops were at one time, early domestic cottages. It is also likely that the sawpit mentioned, turned into the pond referred to by Rev. Hill in his book, *'A record of the parish of Shrivenham,' Chap 1 – Page 9*).



Announcement in N.W. Herald dated 9th December 1898, of the new Butcher's Shop

The whole building was completely burnt out, the blaze lasting for at least an hour. We also learned from the newspaper article, how far along the street it extended, with the sentence, *'But the people worked energetically with buckets of water to prevent the fire spreading to Mr T Stevens' house, which adjoins one end of the building.'* (Today No 35 High St).



Above - No 35 High St, the red building next to the garage, still occupied by Thomas Stevens in 1911. Below - the scar of the old wall on the gable end of No 35

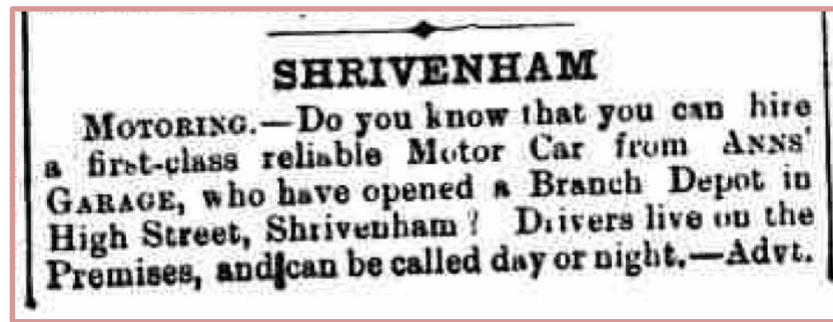


After the fire the information is scarce as to what happened on the site. We can glean information from some of the Shrivenham elders interviewed by Shrivenham Heritage Society. Dennis Stratton recalls that Tom Dike, Undertaker, had a workshop where the new Vicarage is today. (SHS N1296). Len Knapp recalled similar and described that from No 35 High St, *'there was a high stone wall about 40 yards long in line, reaching the two cottages. (See photo above from 1950s) In this wall was a pair of wooden doors, and this all formed the front boundary of a Wheelwright's yard with a line of workshops along the back, operated by Tom Dike and his son Willie.'* But he also went on to state that, *'The western end of this yard was purchased by Mr Collins and David Mortimer who erected a Service Station.'* (SHS N1239)



This photo from a Boundary Walk that took place in the 1970s (See N1245) shows the workshops referred to above. The new Vicarage now occupies this space.

The days of literal, horsepower, were by this time firmly numbered when it was realised that the motor vehicle and the internal combustion engine, were going to take over the world. The proprietors of Anns' Garage in Faringdon, wasted no time in bringing cars to Shrivenham as the advert below clearly showed. (Faringdon Adver 8th June 1912).

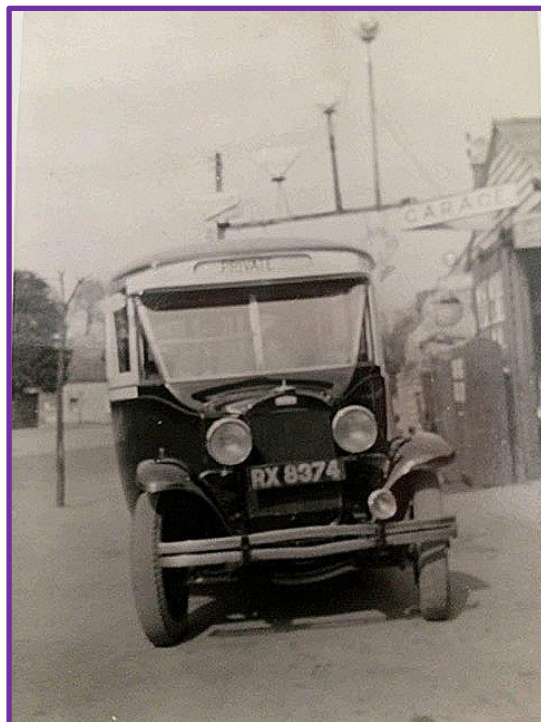


A newspaper listing provided the information that the proprietor of the garage preferred not to use his full name. A death column noted that on 29th January 1922, William Collins Bellworthy, aged 76, died, at the Garage, Shrivenham. (Faringdon Adver 4th Feb 1922). In 1929 an A. Collins was advertising, *'Why the Raleigh – the All-Steel bicycle is better,'* and what's more, you could purchase one for £5.19.6. The Kellys Directory for 1927 listed an A. Collins as a cycle dealer, but added it was, *'Lady Barrington Homes.'* He was operating out of a small business unit further up the high street near the Memorial Hall, set up by Lady Charlotte Barrington for war veterans. By 1934 it was a C. Collins who was running the garage when he was forced to defend a court action brought about by John Charles Coles of Watchfield High Street, who had handed over a Wireless Set (Radio) to Collins, who said he could sell it. Collins gave the set to a man who had regularly bought petrol from him on approval, but the man, and the radio, were never seen again. John Coles won the case and Collins was ordered to pay him £9. (N.W. Herald 12th Oct 1934).

With thanks to Jennifer Varney, we can continue the story of the garage still further. Jennifer, who lives in Shrivenham is the daughter of Reg Knapp. She informed us that Reg purchased the garage in the mid 1930s and it was then only a wooden building, and known as, *'Knapp's Garage.'* She also allowed us copies of her photos that are historic gems.

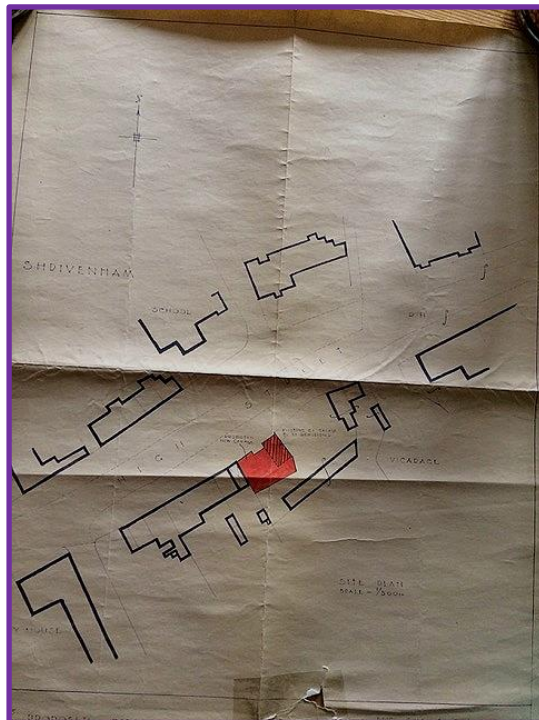


As you can see by the photo above, the garage was just a wooden structure with the petrol pumps on the right. The man on the left in the long coat is Reg Knapp.



The above was Reg's old bus that was used for contract work such as schools, parked outside the original wooden garage.

The photo below was a newer bus from the 1950s, but note that the garage had been rebuilt to what it looks like today. The photo after is of a map dated April 1937, applying to build a new garage to replace the old wooden structure.





Above, the new garage that replaced the old wooden one. The car belonged to Harold Pope. Does anyone recognise the make and model? Notice the old type petrol pumps. It was these that would cause a problem in subsequent years. With safety regulations becoming more comprehensive, the costs of upgrading was huge as the tanks below ground would also have had to be replaced. The owners of the garage could not afford it and were forced to stop dispensing fuel. Reg Knapp sold the garage as a going concern until approx 1975.

In recent years it has been turned into a delightful, small retail mall.

If any reader has further information on this site please get in touch with us by emailing info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk

