

Whilst reading this interview it would be useful to have the SHS website to hand for a further explanation to what Bill is referring. Where we have further information we have placed a link ref close by.

Bill Knapp Remembers

My name is Albert William Knapp and I live at 17 Highworth Road, 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 and my father and 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 that is now occupied by Mr Leslie Judd. *When great-grandfather died it reverted back to Lord Barrington as it lay on estate land.* And that is how it got into the Barrington estate. (See SHS Listing No N568 for a further explanation). Going back a very long way back, I've already given you an epitaph of a tombstone of a George Knapp who was an ancestor of ours buried in Shrivenham Churchyard in 1732. (See below). Going back farther than that, the Knapps first came to Shrivenham in 1649. Two brothers left Abingdon and came to Shrivenham and therefore the two families have got spread out now but they are no relation whatsoever. All the Knapps in this district originally were related. That includes the Stanford in the Vale Knapps and various others.



Going back to my father, he was born in a cottage, a thatched cottage which some will still remember where you go into Mr Cameron's who delivered the milk around the village until recently. (Yew Tree House). It was an old, thatched cottage and was pulled down many years ago now but my father was born there in 1864. (See SHS Listing No N946). He left there as a very young child. The incoming tenant was a Mr Geeler who was gardener at Shrivenham House for many, many years for Miss Milligan. Soon after he left the cottage it was pulled down and now nothing remains of it. Not many people will remember the owner of the manor, a man called Amariah Fairthorne. He lived there for many years and took part in numerous administrative jobs in the village. He was always a devout churchman I can tell you. I knew his son, Mr Barclay William Fairthorne who was an engineer. He lived at Abingdon towards the end of his life and died there. His wife died there soon after. I bought the last remaining property owned by the Fairthornes not so many years ago now - about 1960 or perhaps a little before that. (See SHS Listing No N798). They were a very old Shrivenham family and where Shrivenham School now stands I've been given to understand that before the school was built there, there was a 6-gabled house that stood on the site and was struck down to make way for the new school which was built by my great- great-uncle, Mr William Knapp, who also built Watchfield Church and Bourton Church in roundabout the 1850's. (See SHS Listing No N421). My father went to the present school but my grandfather did not. He went to a Dame school situated on the corner of the Longcott Road just inside the gates of the College of Science. The other Dame School as perhaps many know already was in the churchyard, in the room that was used to be used for TOC-H at one time I believe. (See below - schoolhouse on left).



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. Many years ago it was a Bakers occupied by a Mr Green. (See SHS Listing N925).

Now we come more up to date. The Police Station that has recently been sold was built in 1915. The first occupants were Sergeant Garrett and PC Wheeler. PC Wheeler was here for many years. The last I heard of him he was not too far away, but he must be getting on now. The Police Station saga has rather come to a sudden end. (Now made into one house).

I've been told by my father that the first job he had when he first left school was to make the footpath or help make the footpath from Shrivenham to the railway station. And in 1881 when that awful snowstorm when here were drifts 6 feet deep all down Station Road and my father among many others helped dig a trench to get people to the Station. I've heard him say that a few days after, they were sliding on a pond in Damson Trees which is now built on, and the Great Western factory hooter boomed out and a thaw set in and got rid of it all.

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. (See SHS Listing N2553). 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. (There is no written evidence for this). 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. (This is Tudor House - See SHS Listing No N2552).

Coming farther up the village, my father's cousin used to live where Mrs Moon lives now, Mr Reece Kent. He was a very clever tradesman, especially in upholstery and cabinetmaking. And also, he did undertaking. He did this undertaking with the help of Mr Thomas Dike who most people will remember. And when they had a funeral, I can see him now rubbing his hands and saying, "bit of poorish polish Tom". (See SHS Listing No N230).

I now intend to go round the different farms in the village of Shrevenham. At first, I will begin with Friars Farm where years ago Peter Westell was the occupant. He was a proper character and one day he said to Dr Macnamara, "Dr, I've got a cure for the wind". "Oh, have you old man", said Dr Mac. "Yes" he said, "fill yourself up well with vitals and leave no room for it". (For more info on Dr. Mac see SHS Listing N983).

We now go on to Sandhill Farm where Hiscock was the farmer in those days. He was getting old and it was getting towards harvest time and the sparrows were serving his wheat rather badly. So, he gave a shotgun and cartridges to one of his men and said "Go and shoot those sparrows. I will not keep old Peter Westell's sparrows anymore". We now move on to Stallpits Farm which was farmed by the Plummers but very little seems to be known about them. (See SHS Listing N995). Going on to Stainswick Farm, John Skurray was the occupant. He was the ancestor of the Skurrays of the Grain Millers and afterwards the motor trade and are now in Drove Road.

Moving on to Cowleaze Farm. One of my uncles lived there for many years in my lifetime but in the olden days the Lewis family lived there. Following them was a man called Jeffries who had a man working for him by the name of Bob Baldwin and he got into a bit of trouble and had to go to prison. When he came out and went back to work Mr Jeffries kept baiting him to know how he got on in jail and Bob was very loth to say anything about it, but one day he got a bit tired of being baited so much and said to Mr Jeffries, "Well if thee must know I got on all right. One night I dreamt I was in hell and there was a lovely armchair by the fire so I sat down in it. I hadn't been in it long before Old Nick came along and said, "Out of that, that is for Mr Jeffries". I don't think they heard any more about going to jail after that. (See SHS Listing No N994).

Now we go on to Broadleaze Farm on the Longcott Road. Robert Hedges lived there many years ago and while he was there, he had a man who murdered two of his wives from Watchfield, John Carter and afterwards murdered another at Watchfield – this he got hung for. 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. They found the body when he was apprehended for the other murder. This of course has been written in the Press many times. (See SHS Listing No N120).

Going on to Homeleaze which is more or less destroyed now by a fire in the War. It is in the Royal Military College of Science. In those days it was, 'Comfy Wilson,' that was his nickname, lived there and at Homeleaze Farm, one day his men were loading wheat into a waggon, the sacks were about 240 lbs, over two hundredweight, and they were making a bit of a fuss about it. He came out and said, "Cou.cou, if I had my big boots on I'd kick one over the barn." That about sums up most of the farmers in Shrivenham in the olden days. (See SHS Listing No N930).

I should like now to refer back to my great-great-uncle William Knapp who lived in the house Alice Day lives in now. (Faringdon Road – north end of Park Cottis). He wrote a bit of poetry about certain characters in Shrivenham. A piece of poetry runs like this:

*Troublesome Curly, Sealey's Goose
Popular Green and Bustler Fuce
Old Tommy Rich in his low shoes,
Here comes Dinky
What's the news?*

Well, the first line, Troublesome Curly, Sealey's Goose, they were curates. Archdeacon Berens was the Vicar in those days and Curly got into trouble with the Beckett people, Barringtons, therefore it was Troublesome Curly. The other one, Sealey's Goose, had rather a long neck and lodged at Sealey's. Popular Green was the Baker who had the business where the thatched cottages now stand, facing towards the turn in to Stainswick Lane. He was a very popular man. Bustler Fuce was the landlord of the Prince of Wales in that day and he was a bustling kind of fellow. (Henry Fuce was owner and landlord of the Crown pub). Old Tommy Rich in his low shoes, he had a butcher's business where the thatched shop is now. (See SHS Listing N317). He always wore stockings and low shoes. Here comes Dinky, What's the news? Dinky was the bread roundsman and he knew everybody's business and a bit besides. Therefore, you got Here comes Dinky what's the news?

Many years after that my great-great-uncle was building Shrivenham School which I might mention my grandfather never went to it because it was not built, but my father did. Going back, William Knapp was building this school at Shrivenham and Vicar Murray was Vicar and it was Good Friday, and the vicar came across to William Knapp and said he would like the men to go to church as it was Good Friday. William Knapp made no answer and Vicar Murray went off back to the vicarage. When William goes down to the Prince of Wales to have his lunch and then back to the building, over comes Vicar Murray and said it was time for the men to go to church. William Knapp replied to him, "Vicar, I've been down the street and I've searched the Book (bible), and from Genesis to Revelations I can't find where a poor man has to pay a lot of men to go to church." So that ended that.

Vicar Murray used to come to school to teach the bible. He was a hunting man and had rather a large family and as you will see the vicarage was extended in his time. But now of course that is all sold and we've got a new vicarage. That means to say that we have three vicarages in Shrivenham. The vicarage I remember so well was when Cannon Hill was Vicar. My father used to keep cows and the Vicar had his milk off us and my sister and I used to go round with the milk. And the Vicar's housekeeper, Annie, used to call to my sister, sister "Come in Ethel". After a while, the parrot she had there used to do the job for her as soon as she knocked the door, the parrot shouted, "come in Ethel." I remember all this very well although I wasn't very old.

When I first started school in 1909, Wally Ilott started at the same time. (See SHS Listing N286). He fell and broke his arm just outside the infants door.

My uncle Fred, who some might remember was a great character in Shrivenham. And when the Rev. Metford came as Vicar, following Canon Hill, my uncle and Metford were talking one day just outside the Vicarage, and my uncle Fred said to him "In my father's house are many mansions, but you've got one here, you won't get one over Jordan". Poor old Vicar Metford didn't know what to make of that !

Another tale that struck me about Mr Metford; the Vicar of Bishopstone came down to see him when he first came here and he met Mr Tom Foard and he asked him and he asked him what the name of the new Vicar was, and Mr Foard couldn't remember, so off he goes and visits the new Vicar. Presently he came back and saw Mr Foard again, he went up - pushed him in the ribs and said "Metford".

Referring to the churchyard in Shrivenham there's a big oblong stone on the side of the path by Shrivenham House garden. Well Granny Hazell used to keep the Prince of Wales and she had a grandson, (Tom Hazell) who was a tremendous fast bowler. He was known for playing pranks on people and he knew that James and John Knapp lived where Florrie Bunce lives now. (Wisteria Cottage. See SHS N949). They were doing the Bakehouse oven in the shop by the Cross Trees and he knew they were coming out roughly about 3 o'clock in the morning, so Tom Hazell got on top of this big tombstone and covered himself in a white sheet, and when the two Knapps came along from the Lytch Gate and came along the path, they saw this white figure on top of the tombstone, and they took to their heels and raced down to their home like lightning.

Dr Macnamara came as doctor to Shrivenham in 1899. He came as assistant to Dr Nixon who was doctor here. After he had been here a little while they went to Watchfield to a confinement and this woman had already got a boy and a girl and was about to have another baby. Dr McNamara went upstairs and got the job over. He went downstairs and the woman who was there to help said, "what has she got?" "Oh," he said, "two boys and a girl." That was a joke she didn't quite get. (See SHS Listing N983 for photo of Dr. Mac).

The village shop in olden days was behind the school as you go up Manor Lane. (See SHS Listing N890). Samuel Lamb used to keep the shop and he had two sons Johnny and Tommy and they used to go to school with my father. When they departed from Shrivenham, John Lamb went to Nottingham. I'm not sure what industry he was in. He used to write in the local Nottingham paper about Shrivenham and Pennyhooks Brook where he used to go fishing as a lad. His brother was a solicitor in Kent. Some years ago, I and my father were coming up the Ashbury Road and saw two men coming towards us, and one was a bit behind the other, when the one behind did a trot to catch the other up. My father turned to me and said, "I'll swear that's Tommy Lamb," and sure enough it was. He remembered how Tommy ran up to the wicket. He came and stayed with us during the last war for a few days and that was the last we saw of him. Of course, the shop was there for years. A Mr Cooper, one time Coachman for the Barringtons kept it and it was then closed down.

When I went to school there used to be a great warehouse at the side of the boy's playground, since been pulled down. What I remembered particularly was we used to play football in the playground with a tennis ball and often it used to get up in the spouting of this huge warehouse and somebody who was

good at shimming up a drainpipe used to go up to get it and Mr Oliver used to be frightened to death that someone might get hurt. This building is now gone.

I've noticed in recent years, after they had a go at names of the roads, some don't correspond to their correct name, for instance, Manor Lane is not that at all, it's Dodds Lane. Then to Claypits Lane which went through to Pennyhooks Lane, the correct name is Abbot's Lane. The monks of Cirencester used to stay at Shrivenham House and used to walk to Cirencester. Also, I note Stainswick Lane is not correct, it was always Ashbury Road. I was born in it and it says so on my birth certificate.

When I was a boy, the old Berkshire Hunt used to meet in Shrivenham, by the old Cross Trees, now gone. (See SHS Listing N310 for a photo of the trees). There used to be four Elm trees there but one blew down towards the Barrington Arms, so they lopped the others and made them stumps. The Cross Trees was the meeting place for most in the village.

Lady Craven who lived at Ashdown and was the daughter of Lord George Barrington (7th Viscount) used to come down and mount her horse on the mounting block at the end of the Barrington Arms and I've seen her many times doing it. She was a fine horsewoman. They also used to meet at Beckett House. I had an old copy of the North Wilts Herald with a photograph of a meet there and several people I could recognise well. Now of course, traffic has cleared that sort of thing out of the street. (See SHS Listing N951).

I can also remember Shrivenham Fair being held in the village street. Roundabouts, coconut shies, swinging boats, but all that was done away with just after the first world war. Twice a year we used to get that sort of thing. Fair day was the last Thursday in April. In those days, putting a piece of Hawthorne Bush outside the house, they were allowed by charter to sell intoxicating liquor. That of course is in the past. Shrivenham Revel was six weeks after. Many will remember the Foresters Fete at Beckett about the end of July. This was a big occasion. People used to come from miles around and I've seen Shrivenham street full of the Brakes pulled by two horses. Those were the days of course, shan't see them again. When the roundabouts were in the street, the man came to school and allowed each child a free ride. It's all gone - more's the pity. The Ancient Order of Foresters used to have a hall where they met, which is behind the Thatched Shop. (Behind 13 High St in Hazell's Lane). The hall is still in Hazell's Lane used as a dwelling. Forester's Day was a great day. They used to have a band which started at Bourton, through Shrivenham and then down to Beckett.

Crowded Shrivenham was then. On a sunny day it was fine but if it was wet it made all the difference. I remember going with my father to the Great Western Fete in Swindon. I don't think I had ever been in such a thunderstorm before or since. I was stood under father's coat and the rain came down in buckets.

That took place long before the first world war. When the war broke out in 1914, I was staying with my aunt in the Wanborough road, Stratton, and they blew the Great Western Hooter at the factory to call up the reserves and territorials. Some were in the fields picking up the corn and they stuck their prongs in the ground and were gone. Most were never seen again. At the end of the war, I was in school in Swindon. And the G.W Hooter sounded again on November 11th at 11am 1918. We rushed out of school and came home.

Sometime after that I can remember coming home from school on the Friday night and all the windows up Regent Street and Bridge Street were boarded up. There had been a riot, the lads from the war with nothing to do so they rioted. And on the Monday morning when we went to school a flagpole which had been erected by the Town Hall was burned off at the bottom and laid on a trolley.

During the first world war, I was helping my father doing a job and coming home at night we were walking, and I don't think I was out in a blacker night in all my life. If we hadn't known the road we should never have got home. Not long after that the weather turned bitterly cold and we had a terrible spell of frost. I remember going to Highworth and seeing the stream at Friars Mill almost frozen over. Our fellows in the trenches used to have to set fire to their boots to get them off. The east wind was the culprit, 1917 that was, Jan - Feb.

The village of Bourton used to belong to a family called Tucker and the village had got almost past repair and they rebuilt almost all of Bourton as we know it now. (For a full explanation see SHS Listing N147). John baker Tucker, who is buried in Shrivenham churchyard, died in Highworth and he weighed forty stone, and he was brought to Shrivenham on a timber Bob. To get him out of the house in which he died, they had to pull out a window. The Tuckers were silk merchants, that is how they made their money. They also built the Manse and the Baptist Chapel in Bourton.

In 1922 the council had the old pipes out and a new sewage system built in Shrivenham.

The first sale of Beckett property was in 1917, the second 1922 and the third 1927. (See SHS Nos N555, N1512 & N1059).