Victor George Day

I was born in 1933 in Beech Tree Cottage, now called "Alice Cottage", which was about 50 yards from where I live now. My parents lived with my grandmother who was an amazing lady. I don't know how she managed to feed and look after all the family that regularly came. A true matriarch, she was the centre of the family. Shrivenham, of course, was very different then from how it is today. I was born before the advent of the College, now the Defence Academy; houses depended on wells for their supply of water and there was no electricity. Our well was just outside the back door and most people had bucket lavatories. The village was a small backwater; everyone knew everybody else and any strangers were regarded with deep suspicion. The people were what I call "real people" who would share their possessions with anyone in need. If someone said he or she would do something, then their word could be relied on. Shrivenham was the centre of our world and few people ventured outside it. Today, although I've been round the world from east to west and from west to east during my time in the Marines and later in retirement, my heart is firmly in the village I love.

My first and most early memory is that of walking long with my mother as she wheeled my younger brother in a pushchair and walking with Mrs Titcombe. I recall long summer days where the sun always shone and the hedges along the road where I could smell the gentle sweet smell of contented cows chewing the cud. As a boy I remember playing across the fields, climbing trees especially the massive elms that sadly are no longer standing, fishing in the brook or collecting frogspawn. We made our own pleasures in those days; there was no television. There was still deference and I believe I have lived through one of the most rapid changes in society ever. However, to return to my childhood, I remember being fascinated by the area in Watchfield that is now the Nature Reserve. Indeed, I had a hand in this in later life as I was so worried about the badgers that lived there. I even contacted David Bellamy of TV fame but sadly he was not interested. I knew that each year they returned to their original haunts to produce their young and they always followed the same path that meant they had to cross the busy A420. When the By-Pass was under construction in 1983/84 and with the support of the Otters from the nearby farms I did successfully manage to put pressure on the County Council who got the Highways Authority to construct a tunnel for the badgers to use under the by-pass. This tunnel came out in Lydia Otter's farm (Pennyhooks). Badgers are real scavengers and we used to entice them with dead chickens to get them used to their new run. They soon learnt.

As I said, Shrivenham was my world and I remember as a small lad feeling devastated when I went to stay overnight in Ashbury for a treat. My grandfather was a wheelwright and incidentally a founder of the Bunces' firm in Ashbury. David Bunce was his great friend. My uncle was the travelling

representative for this firm to advertise their ploughs. Our family was related to the Dances, the MacGregors, the Titcombes and the Lukers. My family can trace its origins in this area back to 1602. In the infamous murders of Watchfield that made the national news headlines in 1909, my great-great-aunt was one of the women murdered by that man Carter. Our great friend and neighbour, Mrs MacGregor is my daughter-in-law's grandmother and that makes Mrs MacGregor the great-grandmother of my two grandsons, Cavan and Ethan. As a boy I remember rescuing Mrs MacGregor's little daughter Julie from the road just before she was about to be hit by a car. If I hadn't done this I could not have written what I just have.

I started the Infants School in Shrivenham in 1938 and I appear on the 1939 Empire Day photograph. My teacher was Mrs Dance, wife of the headmaster. I got on well with her and also with Miss Gregory, who eventually became Sue Drew's mother. An abiding memory is that of the smoke and smell of the tortoise stove in both of the classrooms. One day the infant teacher was so infuriated with a boy who was persistently disruptive that she imprisoned this child in the corner by placing a fireguard over him. The headmaster was reasonably fair unless he had had a drink in the Barrington Arms at lunch time. I remember one day when a boy, probably aged about 11 and who worked on one of the various farms in his spare time wrestled with Mr Dance as he was about to be caned. The boy was big and strong and soon the head master had to concede defeat. I later transferred to Faringdon School at the age of 12 and I hated it, deriving very little benefit from it. I left when I was 14 – that was the school leaving age then. It has always been one my greatest regrets that during my schooldays there was no education in the classics or literature. I discovered my love of history only when I left school.

Despite my lack of academic education I had great opportunities for learning about the land. At school we regularly went to the farm buildings that were situated at the back of Manor Lane. Pam Ilott lived there just before it was pulled down in the 1950's. 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 that 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. Across the road from our house was Mr Harry Knapp's dairy farm and cottage. He was not too hot on spelling and the board outside the cottage displayed the words "Knapp's Diary". I often went over to help him. He kept shorthorns and they could be a bit frisky. I had a frightening experience one day when Mr Knapp who owned all the land on the right hand side of the Longcot road, told me to take the horse and cart out of the field to deliver something up the yard in the Longcot Road. Diamond, the magnificent shire, was already hitched to the cart. I was about 10 at the time and knew Diamond, like the rest of his breed, was very gentle. So off I set and we went up the Longcot Road. Suddenly a horse fly

stung Diamond on his backside, causing him to rear. The weight of the ton of horse tipped me out of the cart and I could only gaze in horror as he bolted down the road, hooves clattering. I watched him whistle round Vicarage Lane and race towards the safety of his stable, demolishing the gatepost in his wake. Comprehensively, I seem to remember.

As a child I learned a lot about nature. I saw calves being born. This was before artificial insemination so I got used to the sight of the bull serving the cows. In those days my Grandmother would send me over to the farm for a jug of the first milk just after a cow had calved. This milk made wonderful junket since there was so much rennet in it.

My grandmother was a very sociable person. Every Sunday my great-uncle who lived at Stratton used to come to the home with his son. This son had a wonderful singing voice and my great-uncle was a dab hand at making wine. It was a very convivial occasion. In addition to my parents and my brothers, the great aunts used to be there. Somehow my Gran accommodated them all and the house was filled to bursting. I can dimly remember sleeping between two great aunts.

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. Actually he died there whilst at work. My great grandmother worked in the laundry and my father worked on the brickwork of the new College in the 1930's. As for me, when I came out of the Royal Marines I had lots of jobs ending up taking the position of fireman and my son is still employed there in the same capacity today. I do remember my grandmother watching the buildings going up in the 1930's and commenting rather dourly; "No good will come from it."

Early on in Second World War these barracks were used to house the officer cadets of the Royal Artillery who were here for their "ack-ack" training. Because of Shrivenham's micro-climate where the skies could be almost guaranteed to be clear and free from mist or fog, the Minister of War, Hoare Belisha, had ordered the Military College to be built here in the late 1930's. Parachute dropping was regularly practised here until 1942/43 and among the pilots was the legendary Douglas Bader.

From 1943 the Americans were based here and those American servicemen brought a breath of fresh air to us in Shrivenham as well as widening our horizons. One of the reasons they were here was to prepare for the D-Day landings in Normandy. Using all manner of craft they practised landing by the China Bridge over the lake by Beckett House. I often used to watch them particularly as they used nets. 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 that 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 about

the dimes and dollars they used in their country so far away. We only saw the white Americans for the black Americans were segregated, operating from the back of Ashdown House. The MT 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. At this time my father worked in the MT section at Shellingford and I remember being green with envy when he arranged for my brother to have a 90 minute flight in a Tiger Moth over the Vale of the White Horse. By this time I'm sorry to say this but my relationship with my father was not good at all. He said he didn't think much of me to my face and several times I packed my bag and went to stay with my grandmother, a few yards away. By this time my parents had taken a cottage just behind the Church in Claypits Lane. It was after my great-grandmother's death that we took on her house on the Faringdon Road in 1943. That was Beech Cottage and we took over the adjacent cottage when the MacGregors left for Sandhill.

In Shrivenham at this time there were either 15 or 16 Military Tailors. All the military uniforms for those at what is now the College were made in the village during the war. I remember the tailor opposite us. It was situated in a railway carriage on the land known as Knapp's Diary, as Harold Knapp's dairy was written. I believe it was called Walter's Tailor. Later, this disused railway carriage was used as an Antiques shop and also as living accommodation by George and Vi Barrett. After the war the disused railway carriage went to London to be restored. I had a close relationship with my great-grandmother and loved going into her cottage. There in the winter she would tell me stories of bygone days by the light of her paraffin lamp. I would sometimes stay overnight and then in the morning I would notice the frost on the inside of her windows.

How my great-grandmother died haunts me to this very 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 the combat. I'm not sure exactly what happened but my grandmother was crushed to death by one of these tanks that rolled over her. I remember so clearly seeing her lying flat and lifeless in the road just outside Sue Colyer's house. I shall never forget it.

Other images of the war I can remember are when a German bomber flew low over the church tower, almost removing the weathervane. He was returning home after a raid and he then proceeded to jettison his excess bombs over the Otters' farm. Fortunately, no-one was hurt. It was quite a thrill to see an enemy plane on fire. This would bring the Queen Mary lorries used for transporting aircraft, intact or crashed. Quickly a military cordon would be thrown around the enemy plane and it was an opportunity to find out as much as the Army could about any new developments by the Germans.

Human nature being what it is, people swooped on the crashed aircraft for souvenirs and I remember rings being made from the metal.

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 2 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. I was disappointed but determined to toughen up and get really fit. At this time I was working for Gordon Cox on the farm where being outside most of the time and deliberately working without shoes, I soon became tanned, muscular and tough. Thus it was that early in 1949 found me taking the train from Old Town to Salisbury along with 3 other would be recruits, stopping at every chicken station along the way. After a thorough examination we were all pronounced A1. Just afterwards, I happened to notice that one of the examiners was an uncle of mine who had been at the Battle of the River Plate during the War. His ship was the HMS Exeter. That day we were all told to go home and we would be contacted in due course. It was more than a little while before I could put on the uniform of the Marines , in fact 6 November 1951 and I signed on for 7 years. It was at the time of the Korean War that I got my papers and was told to report to Deal in Kent with 3 other would be Marines. I remember it well for it was a blustery November night and I had been put in charge of the other 3 recruits. That was a quirk of fate for my navy number simply made me the longest serving member. It was the first and only time in my life that I had slept fully dressed with no sheets. At first light we were woken, and taken to swear our allegiance to King George V1. At this point we really were Marines.

Our Marine training had many facets. At Deal we were taught how to march; we did a gunners course at Portsmouth and later at Lymphstone we learned about heavy infantry training. After Bickley, near Plymouth we were marched to do Commando training just before Christmas 1952. And then, to

our joy, we were sent to a ship, a light cruiser, HMS Cleopatra which was being smartened up at Weymouth for the Review to mark the Queen's coronation. Something that I shall never forget was when we were sent to Spithead, the anchorage outside Portsmouth, for Her Majesty's Review of the fleet, for by this time Queen Elizabeth 11 has ascended the throne and we were now soldiers of he Queen. It was a most impressive sight. The whole Fleet was there – everything that could be polished had been polished, all uniforms pressed and all the crews lined the decks as the young Queen in the royal yacht, Britannia, slowly steamed past. It was a clear, beautiful day not long after the Coronation and Portsmouth that day was a most colourful sight. Every country from all over the world had been invited to partake – in those days the world was a very friendly place. I particularly remember the Chileans and the Argentinians. All the ships turned round with the tide and the cheering that was heard that day as the Britannia made her progress was heart-warming. As I say, that day will live with me for ever. At dusk it was an unforgettable sight to see all the ships lit up. Later in the evening we "spliced the mainbrace" which meant we all got an extra tot of rum.

My next posting was back to Chatham to a heavier cruiser –HMS Swiftshore. We joined the USA fleet in Greenland, going over the Arctic circle to the Straits of Denmark. We experienced a bit of a drama there when we were doing blackout exercises in the dark. A destroyer went into the side of our ship which then caught fire. The paint locker up in the bows was heavily alight. Someone must have been looking after us as we had not one casualty. Nearly all the crew who would normally have been in that area were at one side of the Mess. It was a little bit of free time for us and we were all playing Ukers at the time. Quite frankly this is what saved us. Had they been near the paint locker it would have been a very different story. Although it was a serious fire which smouldered for 2 weeks there was no panic. The ship put into Halfjord in Iceland before we moved on. The USA boats moved alongside us and helped to repair the gaping hole in the side of the ship. We had nowhere to sleep until we arrived back in Chatham. The Americans were really helpful and slung hammocks for us to have some sort of rest amid the planks used to shore up the side. We told ourselves how lucky we were to escape with our lives as we limped back to Chatham over 7 or 8 days. In the dockyard the ship was pronounced to be so badly damaged that it was scrapped.

So there we were Marines without a ship and sent down to Portsmouth to be part of a holding company waiting to be drafted on to our next ship. I was assigned to be the General's gardener while we were waiting. It seemed almost ironic that I'd left working on the land in Shrivenham when I joined the Marines to see the sea and what did I end up doing? At this time the Korean War was at its height. I was hoping to go with the Commandoes but that was not to be. Soon, we were assigned to HMS Jamaica, which was in dry dock being re-fitted. It was while I was at Portsmouth that I met the love of my life, Edna who has staunchly supported me over the years and who had come down from the Midlands with 3 friends for a holiday. We established

an immediate rapport. However, it wasn't long before I changed my gardening legs for sea legs. HMS Newcastle was our next cruiser and with her 6inch guns she was taking us to the Far East. There was a crew of 800 on board and in common with most other cruisers she had a band and carried a naval chaplain as well. Strangely enough, at one of the functions later on aboard this ship when we were ordered to serve drinks to the visitors, I must have served cocktails to Julian Newman, a naval chaplain at that time and who later became Vicar of Shrivenham in the late 1960s. Setting sail from Portsmouth we went through the Bay of Biscay, around Gibraltar and thence to Malta, our first stop, where we docked in the Grand Harbour. Here we spent 2 or 3 weeks doing exercises with various other nations. Soon we were on the move again and passed through the Suez Canal on our way to Tricomalee in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka,where there was an excellent naval hospital. A little while after we left Tricomalee that hospital was urgently required for one of our seamen who was unlucky enough to have appendicitis and needed immediate medical attention. So, at full speed, this ship of 10,000 tons steamed back to the island. It must have been a most impressive sight. We left him at Tricomalee and then we were on our way to Singapore. By this time, 1954, the Korean War had finished. We went on to do exercises in the Indian Ocean and the Far China Seas and from there to Hong Kong.

By this time we were a peacekeeping force and working for the United Nations. We steamed up the 38th parallel from Korea to Japan, put in at Kure and then at Kobi where I saw the snow-capped Mount Fuji- it was beautiful. I have to say that I found Japan to be very attractive particularly when we steamed through the inland sea. On both sides were mountains and the land was terraced up the sides of the mountains. We saw tiny children with jet black hair, looking like little dolls lining the edges of this inland sea as we passed. Later on, we found the Japanese girls to be charming young women who showed their interest in us. Another memory I have is when we got to the port of Sasebo where there was a stronghold of Americans. A huge poster hung from a tall building bearing the words: "Through this port passed the best God-damned fighting men in the world". Altogether we were away for about 18 months and throughout this time I wrote to Edna every day and every day I had a letter from her. We must have kept the Post Office busy. I have lots of happy memories from these days . We had some wild old times and escapades . Outside the Barracks we seamen were anonymous and our superiors expected us to get drunk every night. I particularly remember one morning when I was running up the flag. A taxi suddenly stopped and a man jumped out wearing only his pyjamas. He quickly ran in, saying "Her husband returned unexpectedly in the middle of the night. Cor, she was something". From Japan we went to Australia, docking at Perth on the west coast before going on to Freemantle, Melbourne and Tasmania. I really enjoyed seeing the south Island of New Zealand – it was so like he 1930's back in England. There was an unhurried lifestyle and somehow it was less sophisticated. After Auckland and Wellington it was back to sea and to arrive at Sydney. It amused me to hear the Sydney Harbour Bridge referred to as the "Coathanger Bridge". This, of course was in the days long before the

building of the Sydney Opera House. In Newcastle we found ourselves among friends. I'm sure this was because of our ship the HMS Newcastle. Leaving the land of Oz it was back to Singapore where the ship spent a couple of weeks in dry dock. From there to Rangoon and it was here to the delight of the crew we met the actress…….. who was also an activist for women's rights. At that time the beginnings of the brutal political regime were there.

We flew back from Bangkok in the Far East to Pakistan, changed at Calcutta and at Bahrein, Karachi Cyprus and Naples in air transport that was functional rather than comfortable. It was back to Chatham where I worked in the Stores. I was always known as "Happy Day". In the Stores I was regarded as a key man and accordingly paid 6d a day extra. I was really there too long but they were happy days. We were jokingly called the Dogger Bank Dragoons. I remember going as part of a group to see Bob Monkhouse. It was a good night out with lots of laughter and camaraderie. Not only did I have a good boss who looked after his staff, I also had a good relationship with the Dockyard workers and I was able to return to Shrivenham each weekend. On the gun wharf itself there is Nelson's sketch of the design he had for the Victory. It now has a preservation order on it. I served 7 years in the Marines during which I made some life long friends and we have kept in touch with other over the years. At this time the British Fleet was massive. It consisted of the Home Fleet and also the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific and the Far East Fleets as well. Gt Britain could send a gun boat almost immediately up any river in the world that was in trouble.

In November 1958, my 7 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 10 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 7 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.

So what was it that led me in 1963 to seek employment at the College as a Fireman and where I stayed until I was retired in 1992. One of the reasons was the fact that the pay for a Fireman at the College was more than I had been getting. By this time our second son, Derek had been born, so we were now a family of four. Another reason was that having served in the Marines, I felt comfortable with having to wear a uniform for work and also being surrounded by hundreds of other people also in uniform at the Royal Military College of Science. I'm not sure if I should mention this but I was becoming increasingly aware of how little I knew (some say that is a sign of maturity) and I did wonder if perhaps in slack periods I could catch up on some reading. I was enjoying reading some of the classics that I had missed in my education and I was also becoming increasingly interested in politics. At this time I was serving as a youth club representative on the Shrivenham Hall Management Committee prior to standing for election to the Shrivenham Parish Council. I first became a Councillor in 1961. I'd like to mention that I had joined the Toc H movement in 1949 when Shrivenham had a thriving and energetic group working for the benefit of under-privileged people in this area. When I was in the Marines I had met the founder of this movement. Tubby Clayton and had been very impressed by him. Also in the Marines in Hong Kong, Rangoon, South Korea and Singapore, whenever the ship was in dock I had become involved in the Toc-H orphanages in my free time. I felt that I was so lucky to be physically fit, myself, and I'd always wanted to help the youngsters. In 1963 the Toc-H in Shrivenham was thriving and we used to meet in what is now called the church room in the churchyard. With my regular hours of work as a Fireman established Edna and I "adopted" a little girl from Dr Barnado's Home in Frilford. She would come to our house for a few hours or we would take her out to see the ducks or go to the park to play. We got quite fond of her before she moved to another Home in Warwickshire. The Young Wives group in Shrivenham used to keep in touch with her, too.

One of my first tasks as a fireman was to get myself qualified as a First Aider and this has played very important part in my life. I wanted to learn more and more about this subject and eventually became an Instructor for the teaching of First Aid. On the strength of that I'm sure that was why I was asked to form a St John Ambulance Brigade in the village in 1982. I enjoyed my time in the Fire Service and spent about 30years there, retiring in 1992. We were there to provide help to the Army in case of fire and our patch covered about 800 acres. It included all the teaching blocks, laboratories,Army housing and of course that lovely Beckett House. I have to say that we did not have huge blazes to contend with, although there was

great excitement when the helicopter shed caught fire early one evening when most people had gone home. There was talk of it being sabotage. A house fire in Lake Road caused us a bit of anxiety, too. I have a very poignant memory of my time there but it has nothing to do with fire. At some time in the 1980's there was a national ambulance strike. The brother of one of my friends in the village worked in the College. I heard that he was very seriously ill and needed to go to hospital immediately. I asked my boss, Col Niven if I could have permission to go off site to take him in the ambulance we, as St John's had in the village. I drove this man to the hospital. When he got out of the vehicle he paused and said: "it's lovely to feel the breeze on my face". He died the next day.

While we were kept busy with training, looking after the vehicles, equipment, uniforms or inspecting any suspicious objects on our patch, I became aware that from time to time I was able to think about what was becoming increasingly important to me – my life as a parish councillor. That, of course is a voluntary occupation and I've been able to translate my love of this village, which dates back to before the Norman Conquest, into helping make decisions which provide amenities and have a bearing on the quality of life in the village. In politics my allegiance has always been to the Conservatives. Life has a way of throwing surprises, however. My surprise was when, as a Fireman, I was asked, not just asked but positively sought out and persuaded to become a shop steward by an ardent Socialist. I have to confess that I was rather curious about this since I wanted to see what motivated the men to hold the opinions they had and their attitudes to their work. One or two more articulate ones who believed that the worker was always right and the boss was always wrong provided material for interesting debates.

As a Fireman I volunteered to go to Belfast in 1971 in the MOD Fire Service. We were not political in any way, for we were there to give back up support in armoured fire trucks. We were called out one day when one of the Belfast Firemen got shot. Luckily, we suffered no casualties and were accompanied with a ferret scout car. I did get stoned one day just outside the Crumlin gaol and was cut above the eye. Part of our task was to unload the gelignite.

During my 30 years as a Parish Councillor I served as Chairman for 6 years and for additional years as Vice Chairman. One position often leads to another and this was true of the Council for I found myself representing the Council as a Trustee of Martens Almshouses (dating back to 1642), and later as a Governor of Shrivenham School for 5 years. As I review the various positions I held, I believe the post that gave me the most satisfaction was when I held the Chair of the Planning Committee in the then Faringdon Rural District Council. Later under the newly re-organised Vale of the White Horse District Council, I took on the position of Chairman of the Housing Department.

An even greater surprise to me was when Rupert Arkell, owner of a famous local brewery, approached me having ascertained certain information from

Col Ray Niven who was then my boss at the College. He asked me to consider very carefully becoming a Magistrate. I felt winded because I felt it was something that only professionals or wealthy people did. I knew very little about the Law and thought I'd be out of my depth. Rupert Arkell explained that it was precisely because of my background and my ability to get on with the ordinary person that I would be valued. And so, I became the first blue-collar worker to be appointed to the Bench. I remember going to introduce myself to the Chairman of the Bench at Hatford one evening. A Colonel Blimp figure met me at the door, looked me over, spotted my Marines tie and with a delighted grin shook me by the hand and said: "Bloody good unit, the Marines. Come in, come in" and then he plied me with sherry. Sadly, I heard later that he had died in a lay-by the following day. I enjoyed my time as a Magistrate when I had done my running in time and was very surprised at how well I got on with most of the other Magistrates. At the funeral of one of the Magistrates a few years later, his widow said to me: "My husband always admired you for being a working man".

Being a parish Councillor has had its lighter moments. Edna and I have been the recipients of much hospitality. We have been privileged to meet and dine with such personages as Pam Ayres, the local poet from Stanford in the Vale, we hosted the Minister of Transport, Lynda Chalker, when she came to open the By-Pass in 1984, and we stayed in the turret of a French chateau on a Twinning weekend with Mortree in Normandy to recall just a few. We were also invited to the Queen's Garden Party three times. One totally and unexpected pleasure was when we were asked to show an American couple round Shrivenham. They had come on the QE2 and particularly wanted to see our village. The lady was an energetic, small person with charm; her husband was tall and thin and blind. They stayed at the "Prince" in the village and on the day we met them we invited them back to our cottage for crumpets and a cup of tea. This was so English, they said and loved it. We got on so well with them that we took them to the Cancer Ball in the village the following evening. Somehow we borrowed a suit for Jack. We took them to different places in and around Shrivenham during their stay. They insisted that we visited them in Kentucky the following year. We did this and discovered that they lived in a red brick colonial house in about 10 acres. We continued to visit them over the next 20 years and met Judges, Firemen, farmers, free masons and the local vet who was also the Doctor for the area. Later on we stayed with a Fireman who was also a cattle judge and felt very much at home. I enjoyed helping with the tobacco harvesting and hay-making. Our first friends were by this time getting on in years, were childless and very keen for Edna and me to live permanently in Kentucky. But Vic Day doesn't leave Shrivenham! One outing I particularly remember was the visit to see an American Indian battleplace in Billings, Montana. A Crow American lady by the adorable name of Mardell Plainfeather showed us round. The Crow Indians were one of the few tribes that had never fought the Americans. While we were driving to Billings through the mountains of Montana, we were caught in a complete white-out in October. With

trepidation we continued on our journey very slowly and when we arrived were absolutely amazed to discover there had been no snow at all in Billings.

Looking back over my life I know I have led a very full and active one. I have served as a Royal Marine, been a Magistrate, a JP, a parish councillor, a district councillor, been involved with mental health organisations, housing associations, the Scouts and for many years helped in St John Ambulance. I mention these not because I'm blowing my own trumpet but because they have enabled me to translate my love for this village and the Vale of the White Horse into a practical sphere. One of the things which has touched me most deeply was when I was invited by Lord Vestey to become a Serving Brother of the Order of St John. This was almost by chance since I met him about 12 years ago at Hester Knight's Lockinge home when we assembled to discuss matters relating to Magistrates. Lord Vestey questioned me at length when he heard that I was the Commissioner of St John for Sth Oxfordshire, including the City, Maidenhead and Didcot. He extracted from me details of my other activities. It was another pleasant evening and as I drove home I pondered over the way Fate had led me to becoming a Magistrate. Nothing could have prepared me for the letter I received a few weeks later from the Order of St John. I was stunned to see that I had been recommended to become a Serving Brother. Edna and I duly attended the Investiture in September 1996.

Edna and I have recently celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary. We now recall our memories as we sit in our garden in Shrivenham and marvel at the changes we have seen.