



Early Memories of Shrivenham

Mr Alec Chambers

I moved here in 1926. My father was landlord of the Barrington Arms. In 1937 defence barracks were being built in Beckett Park. J Knox, main contractors, recruited men from Swindon as labourers and builders etc. I remember seeing them all cycling to work through the village. Also, Shrivenham men who worked for the railway would be cycling to the station to catch the train which was the regular transport in those days. I also remember the British Legion Fetes - an annual event held in a field which is now

Fairthorne Way.

When the defence buildings were finished, they became a vehicle reception depot for repairs etc. An anti-aircraft regiment also was based here in Watchfield, the reason being the extremely clear skies in this area. In 1940 it became a flying school and blind flying was practised with the aid of what they call Beam Approach. Chowell Farm was one of the landmarks and was fitted with a beacon which I think is still there.

The B.E. Forces came to Shrivenham after Dunkirk. John Mills, the actor, was one of the many celebrities who came to train here in the RA ack-ack division.

The Americans were billeted here prior to D-Day. They did not like the beer served at the Barrington Arms and kept asking for whisky. It was in very short supply and the landlord kept it for his regular, village customers and refused to sell it to them.

I also remember the village shop - Dyke Stores. The pub had an account with them and when I used to go there for my mother to collect some groceries she needed, it was always debited to the account. I thought I was having things for nothing and one day I took several of my friends from school in the shop and told them to help themselves. I only did it once!

The Coronation was celebrated, the villagers were invited to the Memorial Hall to watch it on television, it was installed by the local radio man who had a shop in Swiss Cottage. The Manor House, Shrivenham was the Hostel for the Women's Land Army - some 30 girls were billeted there - that's were I met Joyce - there are two 'survivors' living in Shrivenham - Sally Thomas and Grace Weston. They all made quite an impact on the village farmers and Saturday night Memorial Hall dances were with Harry Smith and his Band.

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Brian Collins, who lives in Hazells Lane, was a cadet and could probably be a good one to ask about those days.

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Alec remembers the village shop, Dyke Stores. The pub had an account with them and when Alec used to go there for his mother to collect some groceries she needed of course it was always debited to the account. Alec thought he was having things for nothing, and one day he took several of his friends from school in the shop and told them to help themselves. He only did it once! Two Miss Dykes ran the shop (one became Mrs Moon). Two brothers, Tom and Bill Dyke were the undertakers. The workshop was by the Vicarage. A Mrs Titcombe was the "Layer outer".

The Home Guard was formed and became 5th Battalion of Royal Berkshire. There is a recorded history of this and Alec has a copy.

After the War

J Knapp and Sons, Len and Harry, developed the village. They were contracted to build the council houses. Sissy Knapp the daughter married Reg Knapp from Bourton and they ran the garage.