

# **ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO SHRIVENHAM**

A brief history and a suggested walking tour of historic landmarks in the village.

Vivien Moss

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### Acknowledgements

This is not a definitive history of Shrivenham. It is, rather, an attempt to show how our village has developed through the centuries. I am indebted to a great number of people. Some have lent old documents, maps articles and photographs; others have recalled memories and events. In particular I would like to thank Anne Stevenson and the family of the late Les Judd for permission to use their illustrations and textual material; I would also like to thank Professor A Belk, Mr H Biggs, Mrs S Colyer, Mrs A Day, Mr V Day, Ms P Illott, the late Mr W Knapp, Mr M Penny, Mr K Pearce, Mr H Taylor, Mr J Wade and Cranfield University Library Staff. The poems *Of Days Long Ago* and *Ballad for the White Horse* are printed with the permission of Watchfield Village Hall Committee. And lastly, but not least, my thanks go to my husband for his help and support.

I am grateful to Mr Peter Saunders of the Barrington Arms Hotel for sponsoring this third edition of *An Illustrated Guide to Shrivenham*.

The Heritage Centre in the Memorial Hall holds a wealth of documents relating to the history of the village. The Centre is open to visitors from 10–12 noon on Tuesdays and from 5.30–7.30pm on Thursdays.

Website: [www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk](http://www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk)

## INTRODUCTION TO SHRIVENHAM

Shrivenham today is a large village that has doubled its size in the last 50 years. Situated in the Vale of the White Horse, it is 7 miles from Swindon, 5 miles from Faringdon and 72 miles from London. It was originally in Berkshire and has been in Oxfordshire since 1972 when the county boundaries changed. Since the by-pass was opened in 1984 there is now only local traffic in the village and shopping has become much easier and more relaxed at the various shops that include a pharmacy, a supermarket, a newsagent and a florist. The village is twinned with Mortree, a comparable village in Normandy.

Until the outbreak of World War II the village was clustered around the High Street and was dominated by the Beckett estate owned by Lord Barrington. The village started to expand in the early 1950s and the Memorial Hall is now centrally placed instead of being on the outskirts as it was then. It is a friendly bustling village with an active caring community. Attractively situated, there is a wealth of history to be gleaned from looking at the many interesting buildings, cottages and houses.

Two factors have contributed to the dramatic growth of our village: the establishment of the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS) here in 1946, now part of the Defence Academy, and the development of Swindon from being essentially a railway town to one that has welcomed several multi-national firms and high technology industries. For many of their personnel our village is a pleasant place to live.

The history of any place is inextricably linked with its physical and social environment, its economic life, its political climate and the way its inhabitants have thought over the years. The ancient village of Shrivenham has seen life in the Stone Age and Roman times, been

mentioned in the Domesday Book, known the feudal system, experienced life in Tudor England and during the Civil War, witnessed the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the coming of the canals and the railways in the 19th century and has seen the subsequent drift of workers from the land to the town. Its inhabitants have appreciated the benefits to their children of regular schooling and about 80 years ago marvelled at the introduction of electricity. The Barrington family enriched the quality of life in the village for over 200 years and its influence still shows today.

#### EARLY HISTORY

We know that men lived on the Berkshire Downs around 2500 BC in the New Stone Age since we have evidence of their sharpened flint stones and also their scrapers for preparing animal skins for clothing. We know too that the Ridgeway, the grassy track running along the northern edge of the Downs, was well walked by Stone Age men who wished to avoid the low-lying swampy country with its wild animals which is today the Vale of the White Horse where Shrivenham nestles. The White Horse carved into the hillside at Uffington from which the Vale takes its name is pre-historic both in age and appearance. It is 374 feet long and is similar to the elongated horse represented on gold and silver coins minted in England towards the end of the Early Iron Age, about 200 BC.

We do not know for certain when the swamps disappeared and crops were grown on the fertile land that lies around Shrivenham and Watchfield. Incidentally, Shrivenham lies on a geological fault which explains the variation in the types of soil in different parts of the village. There is both sand and clay. The soil in the fields around Shrivenham is mainly well-drained greensand and is excellent for growing wheat. The wheat straw has been used for centuries for thatching. Stone was quarried in Watchfield until early last century and nearby Bourton stands on an outcrop of Portland Stone.

Further evidence of early civilisation in this area was discovered when the Shrivenham by-pass was under construction in 1983. During a week-long archaeological excavation of the site when the bulldozers were halted, the remains of 36 bodies were found. Their heads pointed to the South and they were identified as part of a Saxon burial ground dating from about the 6th century AD. Interestingly, the average height for a fully grown man was 5ft 10in and for a mature woman, 5ft 3in, not too dissimilar from today. One grave contained the remains of a man who had been buried with his spears. During the summer of 1989 a further archaeological exploration of the site uncovered Iron Age relics similar to those found at Uffington Castle and dating back to about 400 BC. Post holes and ditches suggesting that animals had been penned in, together with the base of a round house about 15-20 feet in diameter, were also found. Clearly man had settled and lived in this area from very early days. Several Neolithic remains were also identified in the same place. It is thought that hunter-gatherers around 6000 BC regularly, perhaps seasonally, gathered on this site since Mesolithic flints were found, and that they had settled here about 4000 BC.

On the last day of the excavation an exciting find was made of a young adult male who at his waist had a white metal belt buckle inlaid with decorated brass and three rivets of the same design. It was clear that he had been a man of high status. Even more exciting was the discovery of part of a copper alloy and leather case that contained a balance and a set of weights. Runes were inscribed on one of the case fittings - the first to be found in Wessex. These goods dated the burial between 500 and 550 AD. About this time people fastened their clothing with brooches. Eleven pieces of such Saxon jewellery found at Watchfield can be seen in the Oxford County Museum at Woodstock.

Water is the first requirement of any settlement. The river Cole runs close to the site and would have supplied the water for man's own needs as well as those of his animals. In addition to this there would have been several

springs just below ground level. Geologically speaking, Shrivenham and Watchfield had recently emerged from a swampy and marshy area. In both villages there were several springs and ponds until the water table dropped notably when drains were put in during the 1940s and again in the 1970s. Indeed, houses built as recently as 1937 still had their own wells.

There are a few traces of Roman occupation in the area. Ermin Street at nearby Stratton and the long straight road between Chiseldon and Ogbourne St George are both Roman. About one hundred years ago a tiled floor in Woolstone, 2.5 miles away, was unearthed and identified as part of a Roman farmhouse. A small treasure trove of Roman coins together with the remains of some Roman pottery were found in 1903 in an old well in Bower Copse, now part of the Defence Academy grounds. During the excavations for the by-pass in 1983 the remains of a Roman villa were found close to the Highworth Road.

Variations in the spelling of Shrivenham have occurred through the centuries and they include Sciuneham, Sryvenham, Scrivenham, and Shrinham. Explanations differ as to the meaning of the name.

One interpretation is that an Anglo-Saxon by the name of Scrifena held a piece of land here. 'Ham' was Old English and meant a home. Another explanation is that it referred to the mediaeval habit of being 'shriven' or pardoned for one's sins. Certainly there was a church here in 1086, probably made of wood, and the history of Beckett House goes back well before the Conquest. The Domesday Book (1086) records: 'The King holds Scrivenham in desmesne, King Edward held it. There are 46 hides. There is land for 33 ploughs. On the desmesne there are 4 ploughs and 80 villeins and 17 borderers with 30 ploughs. In the Manor are two mills worth twenty shillings, and 240 acres of meadow and woodland to render (sic) 20 swine. In the time of King Edward it was worth 35 pounds, and afterwards 20, now 45 pounds.'

The Domesday Book also goes on to mention 'a church in Scriveham (sic) with five hides of land, and belonging thereto are one plough, and four villeins, and five borderers with two ploughs. What the priest has is worth 4 pounds'. A hide of land was roughly 100 acres in size and was thought to provide sufficient pasture land for one family to feed themselves and their animals. One estimate of the population at this time suggests that it was about 360 but we have no documentary evidence.

After the Norman Conquest each village was under the protection of a Lord who owned an area of land known as a manor and who rented small-holdings to tenants in return for military service. Life in mediaeval Shriveham would therefore have followed the feudal pattern of service but instead of one manor it is thought that there were four manors: Salop manor held at one time by the Earl of Pembroke, Stallpits manor by the Earl of Salisbury, Rectory manor with the church granted to the Abbey at Cirencester and Becote manor which was later known as Beckett. In addition to these lands there was an estate called Fowersmill. What is recorded is the unusual rent for holding this land in the 14th century: that whenever the King passed through Shriveham he was to be presented with two white capons together with the remark 'Behold Sire, these 2 white capons which you shall have another time but not now'.

A tucking mill in Watchfield was recorded in the Domesday Book as being worth "14 villeins, 6 serfs with land for 4 ploughs, 8 oxen, 150 acres of woodland and £2.10 shillings a year". Tucking or fulling refers to the process used to treat woollen cloth before it is woven. This tucking or fulling mill was re-discovered close to Tuckmill brook in 1958 near Northford. Unfortunately for historians it can no longer be seen since it now lies under an extension to the Shriveham Park Golf Course. Eventually by the early 17th century the manors all became part of the Beckett estate.

In the Middle Ages, Oxfordshire consisted of small villages and hamlets. Cottages with gardens and yards, the church and the manor houses were all surrounded by large open fields, meadows and pasturelands. Beyond this was wasteland and woodland where the pigs were fed. Sheep were kept for their wool and poultry for eggs and meat. The village mill ground the grain, and cider and ale were brewed in the village. It seems that peasant life was probably more restricted and monotonous than squalid. The diet would be limited to cheeses with occasional meals of meat and fish to add variety and each year would be divided by the seasons and the religious festivals. The majority of peasants lived in insubstantial simple houses which were probably re-built every generation. None has survived in Shrivenham and any that might have endured would have been of timber construction with an infilling of woven wattle covered with daub. Cooking would have been done on a central hearth with the smoke escaping through a vent in the roof. The floor would have been of beaten earth. In late mediaeval times the Church was the focus of community life. Few people could read or write and the Vicar kept those records of the Parish which today are kept by local government. The earliest Shrivenham parish vestry record that remains is dated 1575.

#### THE CHURCH

The establishment of ecclesiastical parishes first came about in AD 685 under Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury. In the Domesday Survey in 1086 the five hides of land belonging to the Church together with the Vicar's living were granted by Henry I to the Abbey of Cirencester. The church remained in the diocese of Cirencester for about 400 years before it was transferred to Salisbury in which diocese it stayed until 1836, the year before Victoria became Queen. It is now in the diocese of Oxford. In A Record of the Parish of Shrivenham, Canon E. Hill says that the Abbot of Cirencester reputedly had a house in the village in 1346. It stood to the north of the present church

along the road leading to Pennyhooks Lane today which was known earlier as Abbot's Lane or Abbot's Walk. A map dated 1726 shows the position of Abbots Hill to the north of today's Manor Close development.

There was then a church on the site of the present building, possibly the successor of a previous church, but little remains today. The present St Andrew's church was constructed around a 15th century central tower in the reign of Charles II between 1660 and 1685 by Sir Henry Marten at a cost of £4000. The oldest item in the church is the late 12th century font made from black Purbeck marble and which has an octagonal bowl. It is still used for christenings. Above the font the central window contains two 13th century stone projections that support a small arch. Built into the west wall outside the porch is probably the only remaining fragment of the 12th century church. A record made in 1376 associates the church at Shrivenham with St Mary. It is not known when the name of St Andrew was adopted. During the Civil War, Beckett House was badly damaged by fire and it is not unlikely that the then existing church was also burned. The small stained glass panel at the top of the central East window, said to be the Abbot of Cirencester in his cope and mitre kneeling with his crozier and bearing the date 1505, was introduced by the Earl of Radnor in 1801.

#### THE BECKETT ESTATE

To a great extent the history of Shrivenham village is linked to the history of the manor. The four manors that were thought to have originally constituted Shrivenham eventually all became part of the Beckett estate during the mid-17th century. The history of a dwelling on the site of Beckett House pre-dates the Conquest. Although we have no evidence of how many people lived in Shrivenham at that time we are grateful to the Domesday Book for its valuable recorded information. It has been likened to a gigantic tax return whose purpose was to inform William the

Conqueror where his possessions stood, how much they were worth, and who held them on his behalf. In 1086, William, Count of Evreux lived in what is now Beckett House. It is believed that King John was in residence at Beckett in 1204 since a mandate of that date to the Sheriff of Oxford, originated from Becote which was the old spelling of Beckett.

Later in the 14th century it is probable that the de Becket family who gave their name to the estate lived in a stone built hall-and-solar type of manor house, but the evidence is scanty. In the RMCS Journal for 1951, Major Sewell writes of finds of mediaeval pottery in the south-east corner of Beckett Lawns. He says that this may have been a mediaeval rubbish heap. Handles of large pitchers whose design suggested a date towards the end of the 13th century were found. Other discoveries of flint flakes, probably Neolithic remains, support the view that this area was occupied at least five thousand years ago.

The Barrington family lived at Beckett House from the early 18th century until the mid 1930s. Created a Baron in 1720, the first Lord Barrington had several sons who also had distinguished careers. The eldest son William became the Secretary of the Admiralty, Chancellor of the Exchequer and later Treasurer of the Navy. The fifth son Samuel became Admiral of the White. At that time the main road to Longcot and Wantage ran past Beckett House and over what is now the Defence Academy golf course. In dry weather the progress of this former road can still be clearly seen. In the mid-18th century, therefore, the stagecoach would have driven along the High Street, past the Beehive Cottages in the Longcot Road, into the grounds of the estate and across the ford by the China House. In the style of Inigo Jones, the date of this building is listed as built between 1635-1655 and it is rumoured to have housed a collection of china. It was also a vantage point for the ladies and visitors to Beckett House to watch the stagecoach go by. It may also have

been a fishing lodge for Sir Henry Marten who then owned Beckett. In 1780 Lord Barrington decided to preserve the privacy of his Park; he re-routed the Shrevenham - Longcot - Wantage road to its position we use today.



## Beckett House

The present house was built for the sixth Viscount between 1831 and 1834 in the Elizabethan style. Recent documentary evidence has shown that the design was the work of a talented relative, Thomas Liddell, the brother in law of the 5th Viscount. It is thought that today's house stands a little to the south of the older one since part of the original stood immediately behind it in a photograph dated 1912. Another photograph of similar date shows an orangery with imposing colonnades on the South-West side of the house. There is a close similarity of style between Beckett House and Shrevenham House, once the Dower House, which suggests that the Barringtons commissioned the same architect to design both houses. Sandhill Farmhouse on the Highworth Road also shows similarities of design. All these houses are the result of 19th century re-building of

much earlier houses. The *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardening* records in an article dated 14 August 1873 that the “park gates were freely thrown open on the occasion of what is well known in the district as the Great Western Fete, when hundreds of workmen engaged at the Swindon Railway works came with their families and many more besides”. The Fetes were very popular and continued until 1914.

Almost opposite the lower entrance to the Defence Academy stands Swiss Cottage. It was built in the 1850s by Lord and Lady Barrington as a replica of the Swiss chalet in which they spent their honeymoon. Later it was used as a playhouse for their children. The Beckett estate of about 1500 acres was said at one time to contain examples of all the trees that grow in the Northern Hemisphere.

In 1936 the Beckett estate was sold to the War Department. It was claimed that Shrivenham was one of the few places in the South of England that regularly had clear skies and was thus chosen for an anti-aircraft training establishment. Most of the buildings seen today on the estate were erected before the outbreak of the last war, during which they also served as a temporary University for American Servicemen. In the summer of 1944, the Great Western Railway installed for the American Army an ambulance siding at Shrivenham station. From then until the end of the war, ambulance trains were loaded each night with wounded soldiers who initially had been flown in to Down Ampney Airfield from the Continent. The loaded trains then ran through the night to different hospitals in England such as those in Leamington Spa or Warwick. In 1946 the Military College of Science moved to Shrivenham. It became the Royal Military College of Science in 1953, later changing to the Defence College of Management and Technology (DCMT) and forming part of the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

The Parish Valuation and Rating records for 1881 show that Lord Barrington owned most of the land and houses in Shrivenham including Elm Tree House. The population was then 721. The last member of the Barrington family to live at Beckett was Charlotte, Viscountess Barrington. It is to her that Shrivenham owes so many of its amenities. Aware of the drift from the rural areas to the towns following the second phase of Britain's industrialisation, she was a keen and enthusiastic promoter of the revival of village social life. She was also aware of the needs of the disabled servicemen returning from the First World War. Her tireless activities led to the building of the imposing Memorial Hall opened in 1925 by Princess Beatrice, daughter of Queen Victoria, and to providing the eight houses for disabled servicemen that are placed around the edge of the Recreation Ground. The Hall is still widely used today for Parish meetings and for those of various clubs and societies and satisfies the needs of both the educational and leisure pursuits that Lady Barrington had envisaged. She was instrumental in founding the WI in our village and in encouraging both the Boy Scouts and Girl Guide movements. Lady Barrington did not support the votes for women campaign at that time. She firmly believed that such housewifely abilities as cooking and needlework should be an essential part of every young woman's education. Accordingly, she promoted the interests of domestic economy in the village.

#### SHRIVENHAM IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

We have to use our imagination to understand what life was like in Shrivenham at this time. Most people would have lived and worked close to their place of birth. Shrivenham families would have worked on the land, grown their own food, made their own clothes and until the effects of the Enclosure Acts were experienced in 1653 would have grazed their animals on common land and collected fuel for their fires. In 17th century life there were no factories, few shops and only occasionally

travelling pedlars to supply goods that were not obtainable locally. Only the wealthy travelled on horseback. People measured time by the sun and the seasons, and the poor went to bed when it grew dark since both candles and rushlights were expensive. There are reports of candles being made commercially in Elm Tree House. The few 17th century houses that now remain can be seen in the area around the church: for example, Manor Cottages and the two cottages in the High Street next to the present Vicarage. These houses were probably occupied by the better-off inhabitants at that time and have survived because they were built of stone. The houses of the poor being made of timber, mud and clay have not lasted.

Class divisions were more extreme than they are today and a person's position in the social structure was instantly recognisable by his or her clothes. A man of lower rank knew that he must defer to his superior as laid down by the law of the land. However, it was a closely knit society. The Lord of the Manor was the principal employer and would have been recognised at once as he went about the village or attended Church as indeed everyone was obliged to do each Sunday. He would also distribute charity to the deserving poor. Sir Henry Marten built the almshouses in Claypits Lane in 1641 and established the Almshouses Charity in Shrevenham, which is still extant.

The village did not escape the effects of the Civil War; Beckett House was damaged by fire and it is thought that the original 15th century church was also damaged. The effects of the Enclosure Act in 1653 helped to establish the patchwork effect of the fields around the village that we see today. Literacy was beginning to increase towards the end of the 17th century and this was partly due to the desire of people to read the Bible which was now available in English. It remained largely, however, a

society of transmitted oral culture. Children learned their parents' skills and crafts and inherited their attitudes to morals, politics and society.

By the beginning of the 18th century this closely knit village community was clustered around the High Street and flanked by such farms as Cowleaze, Sandhill, Stainswick and Chapelwick. Sheep were kept in this area in far greater numbers than is the case today. One or two isolated cottages were dotted on the edges of the village and stone was replacing the lath and plaster. The Prince of Wales pub was built about this time and also Wisteria Cottage, Medlar Cottage and Fern Cottage. A little later came the Barrington Arms, though smaller than it is today, and the houses adjacent to it up to Hazell's Lane but excluding the Men's Institute. Roads which had previously been hard and rutted in dry weather or like a quagmire in very wet conditions were beginning to be improved. The Reverend Caleb Colton in 1780 records that the road to Faringdon from Shrivenham was newly made and completed at the expense of William, Lord Barrington. In 1788 he further reports that all the roads in the parish were in good condition.

In Britain the winds of change were blowing and Shrivenham too felt the stirrings of a different way of life. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution it was to experience the most dramatic changes in economic and social life. The first of these changes were the plans made in Swindon in 1793 for the cutting of the Wiltshire-Berkshire Canal. By 1805 this canal had been opened and was navigable as far as Longcot. Its route lay on the south side of the village almost parallel with the present railway line. This canal was a means of transporting coal and other commodities from Swindon to Abingdon. The barges tied up at Bourton Wharf, which can be seen close to the junction with the A420 at the Bourton turn. Built as a narrow canal taking boats up to 72 feet long and 7 feet wide, it brought

additional prosperity to Shrivenham. Then, Horne, the village blacksmith, was kept busy for many years shoeing the horses that pulled the barges along the canal towpath. His forge was to the east of the Prince of Wales at the corner which is known to the locals as Horne's Corner. The canal was abandoned by an Act of Parliament in 1914. At the present time the canal is being restored by an enthusiastic band of hardworking volunteers.

#### SHRIVENHAM IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The advent of the railways in the 19th century produced one of the greatest of all social changes. Designed to carry goods more cheaply and efficiently than the canals, they led to the canals falling into disuse. We need to get into the hearts and minds of the people living here 150 years ago to appreciate fully what a tremendous difference the coming of the railways made to their lives. For the first time ordinary people could travel about the country easily, cheaply and safely. Instead of walking to Swindon they could now travel by train— a journey of about 12 minutes. They could even have travelled to the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. Shrivenham station was opened in 1840 when Bristol and London were linked by Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway.

The Fat Dog, then known as the Victoria Hotel, came into being as did the railway cottages immediately behind it and the Stationmaster's house along the Bourton Road. The railway enabled Shrivenham farmers more easily to obtain and move supplies of fodder, livestock, building materials and fertilisers. It also enabled them to widen their markets. The station was a hive of activity; two consignments of milk for London were loaded daily, as well as boxes of watercress, freshly picked from the water-beds at Ashbury and Watchfield. Drovers 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 either to be put on the train and ferried to their destination, or to be immersed in the sheep dip, for the main sheep dipping centre for the area was in Station

Road. An old photograph shows the railway track to be broad gauge which as railway enthusiasts will know, was finally converted to narrow gauge by the end of the nineteenth century. The first Ordnance Survey map of 1828 shows the route of the old Ashbury Road, now Stainswick Lane, to be very different from today. It twisted and turned from the High Street to Cowleaze Farm.

The fact that people were travelling more widely meant that horizons were broadening and people were beginning to think on a national level as well as locally. About this time came other social developments. Education was available to all children, and newspapers, books and periodicals were being published widely and cheaply. In 1863 Shrivvenham School was built on land donated by Lord Barrington - this was before Forster's famous Education Act of 1870 and the later Act of 1880 making education compulsory between the ages of five and thirteen years. The school was extended in 1899 to cope with the increase in numbers. The population had increased from 721 in 1881 to 1011 in 1891. Generally speaking because wages were increasing at this time the standard of living was also rising and people were better housed and better fed and thus were beginning to withstand the former killer diseases such as scarlet fever and TB. Medical science was in its infancy and infection by bacteria was a new concept. Antisepsis and anaesthesia were new discoveries.

Towards the end of the century the national trend of the drift of people from the land to the new towns was being reflected in Shrivvenham. By 1901 the population had decreased to 951 and it continued to decline until in 1921 it stood at only 592.

Photographs of the late 1890s show several large stately trees in the High Street. They were replaced in 1911 to mark the coronation of King George V. Those in Church Walk were earlier replaced by Canon Hill in 1900. At the beginning of the twentieth century Shrivvenham emerges as a quiet backwater, best described

as a village of thatch and stone. A box hedge bordered almost all the way from the West End and The Green, past the allotments, the Pump Cottages and up to the thatched cottages that once stood on the site that the bank and shops occupy today. A number of new buildings were erected in Shrivvenham about the year 1911. These included the three-storey Cotswold type buildings in the High Street containing today's Post Office, Northam House and the adjacent cottages in the High Street and also Coronation cottages at the top of Stainswick Lane.

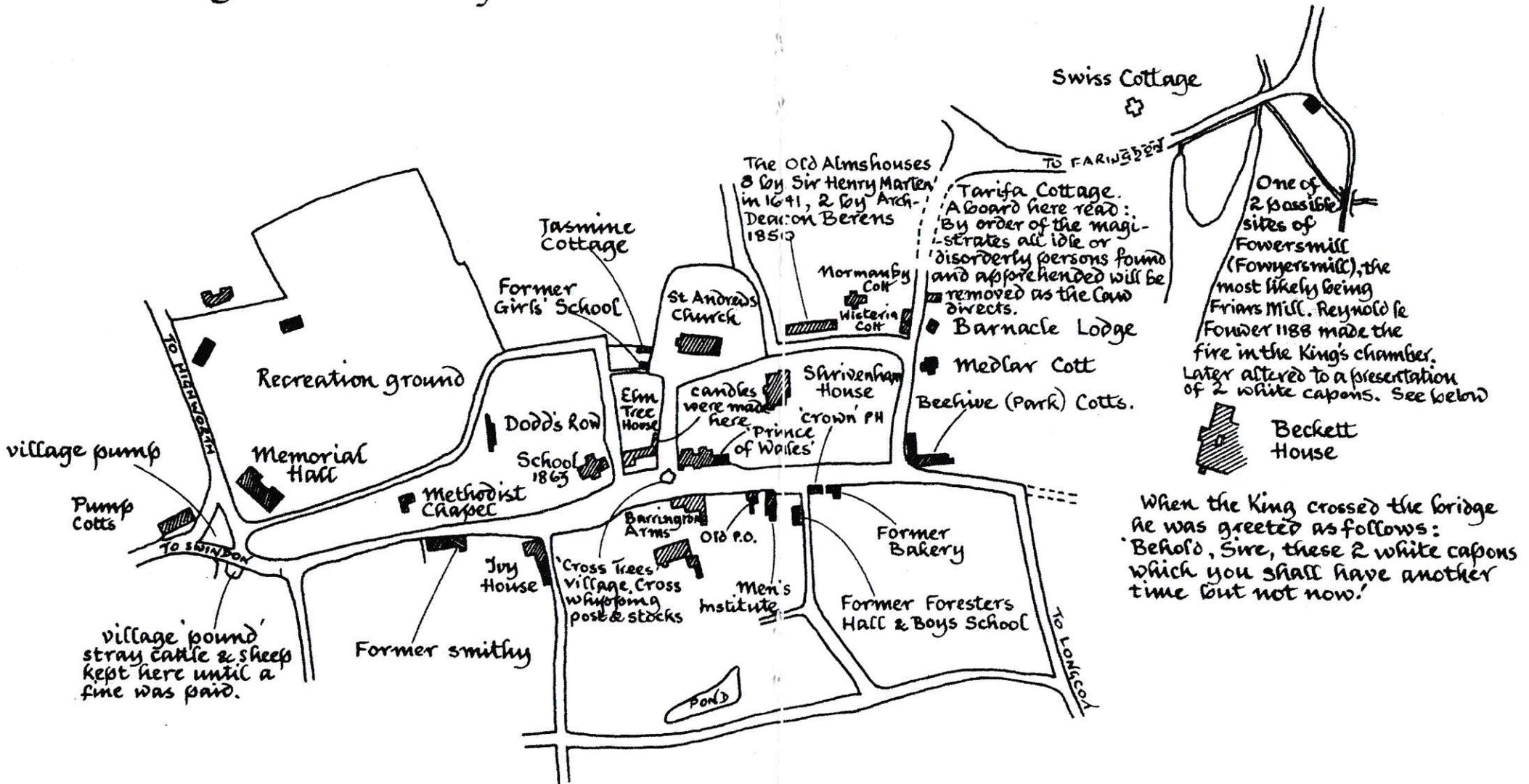
The former Police Station, now a private house, was built in 1915 and we had a resident policeman until the early 1970s. Occupations recorded then show Shrivvenham to be essentially a quiet agricultural village: thatcher, mason, carpenter, farmer, saddler, wheelwright, beer-retailer, baker and gardener for example. The muffin-man regularly visited the village. He would ring his bell to announce his arrival as he came into the High Street. Until 1914, an Annual Fair was held in the High Street each spring. The highlight of the village year was the Fete which was held in Beckett Park each summer and which was organised by the Ancient Order of Foresters.

At the turn of the century the bicycle was beginning to appear on the roads and an occasional motor car would drive through the village. Dr McNamara who practised here between 1898 and 1945 replaced his pony and trap with a motor car in 1908. Water was still drawn from the numerous wells in the village and at dusk oil lamps and candles were lit. There was no gas, electricity or mains drainage. A lighted candle in a jam-jar or perhaps a hurricane lamp was used if going out at night. An early drainage system was installed after the end of the First World War and an improved one put in when the College was built in the late 1930s. However, only the residents who lived at that end of the village were connected to the system then. The Second World War intervened and only when building began again after the War was the rest of the village connected to the mains drainage system.

In 1925 the Memorial Hall, said to be the finest building of its kind in the whole of the south of England, was opened by Princess Beatrice, daughter of Queen Victoria. At this time the eight houses for disabled ex-servicemen had also been built around the Recreation Ground. Early council houses in Stallpits Road had been started and the population stood at 633. The former A420 road was re-positioned in 1929. Originally it turned sharp left and then sharp right behind today's bus stop opposite The Green. The two thatched cottages which stood on the site of the bus shelter were demolished in the course of straightening the road. One was said to be of wattle and daub.

During the mid-1930s Shrivvenham felt more stirrings of the changes that propelled it to the village that we know today. Electricity came to the village in 1934 and with it piped water and street lighting. As we have seen, the Beckett estate had been sold to the War Department in 1936 and the village was growing steadily with the addition of the council houses in Sandhills and Stallpits Road. A few houses were built in Stainswick Lane, then known as the Ashbury Road, but further building was suspended until after the end of the war. Stainswick Lane was named after Stainswick Farm which in turn is thought to have derived its name from Gilbert de la Stane who lived here before 1336. Fairthorne Way, named after the family who lived in the manor near the Church, was finished in the 1950s. The Bradley houses whose roads, Charlbury, Cowleaze and Chapelwick Close, are named after nearby farms were completed in the early 1960s just after the houses in Damson Trees. Canon Hill's Gardens, Berens Road and Colton Road are all named after former Vicars of the parish. Since the 1970s the Berens Road and Swanhill developments have been completed. Springfield Close was named after the only spring in Shrivvenham that at one time bubbled up in that field. Salop Close is called after the manor that was between Bourton and Shrivvenham. The modern Stonefield Close gets its name from the many stones that once formed the old road from Ashbury to Shrivvenham as the map of 1828 shows.

# A Map of Shrivenham showing main sites of interest



## SUGGESTED TOUR OF OLD SHRIVENHAM

Start at the Cross Trees to the right of Elm Tree House in the High Street. Two small trees have recently replaced the three stately elms that once stood here towering above the remains of an ancient stone cross. Here too stood the village stocks and a whipping post for those found guilty of breaking the law. These were reconstructed in 1977. A carter who had stolen saffron to give his horse was the last miscreant to sit in the originals.



### Elm Tree House

Immediately opposite is the Barrington Arms. It was first mentioned as the Lord's Arms in 1750 when it was much smaller than it is today. The west side was extended in the 19th century and until the early 1930s a mounting block stood outside.

Adjacent to the Barrington Arms, on the left hand side as one looks at the pub, is probably the oldest house in the village, Tudor House, which is thought to date from the 14th century. Records show a dwelling here '20

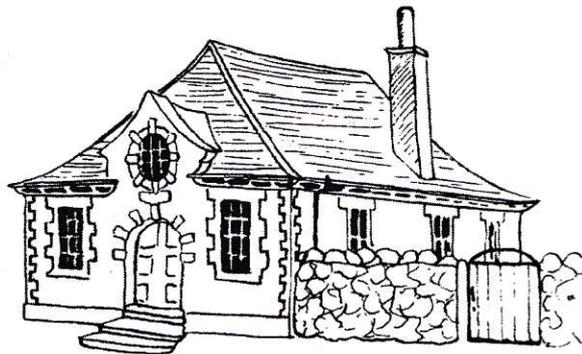
years into the reign of Elizabeth I'.

An elderly resident remembered the shock he had when called to repair the slate roof in 1920 and discovered a complete thatched roof beneath the tiles. He also spoke of it as the 'Old Rectory' which means it could possibly have been Archdeacon Berens' abode before he built the large vicarage in 1804 that is to the right of the Barrington Arms and is now a private dwelling. Tudor House also has a most unusual wooden spiral staircase leading to a turret.



Opposite the Barrington Arms on the left as you walk towards Faringdon is a row of three dwellings. They are listed as early 18th century and the end one has served variously as the King's Arms public house, a baker's shop, a grocer's store and recently has become a restaurant. Just beyond these three buildings is the Prince of Wales, a 17th century building with an 18th century addition on the east side. It was licensed as an ale-house in 1796; coaches and horses would have driven into the yard at the side.

The architecture of The Firs opposite, suggests that it is of Georgian origin. Its neighbour was the Post Office until 1962 and dates from the 17th century. It was here that the coach and horses of the Royal Mail could be seen every night at 9.45 reining in to collect the post. This happened until the outbreak of the First World War. The Postmistress at the turn of that century has described how the mail would arrive by coach from Swindon at 3am and how, at the sound of the driver's horn, she would throw out the front door key tied to a duster from an upstairs window to enable the driver to deliver the mail.



MEN'S INSTITUTE

The Men's Institute is comparatively modern and was erected on a site given by Lord Barrington in 1904. It was the Reading Room for the men and boys of the village. Later it was used by clubs and societies, and also housed a library, but is now in private ownership.



Until recently the Treatment Rooms was a restaurant. For many years earlier it was a General Store owned by the Dike family and is another building listed as 17th century. The building at right angles to it in Hazell's Lane was the Boys School from 1703 until 1863 and the schoolmaster lived in what is now the Treatment Rooms. After the boys were transferred to the village school in 1863 their former school was used as the meeting place of the Ancient Order of Foresters, a Friendly Society which raised money locally for charitable purposes, and the building was known as the Foresters' Hall. Hazell's Lane takes its name from a butcher who lived there in 'Puffing Billy Cottage', which was demolished with its 3 neighbours in the 1960s.

As you return to the corner by the Treatment Rooms you will see that the Faringdon Road takes a sharp left hand turn. This corner is known locally as Horne's Corner after the blacksmith who kept his shop between the Prince of Wales pub and this corner perhaps 150 years ago.

Beyond the Crown Inn, walk for a few yards along the Longcot Road. The row of picturesque cottages on the left, known as the Beehive Cottages or more properly, Park Cottages, were built in the late 17th century.



PARK COTTAGES

The corner cottage shows evidence of having been constructed after its neighbours and it was thought once to have been the home of the village constable. It is quite likely that this row of cottages was once part of a stabling block many years ago since the large barn housing the Barrington family's carriages stood complete with water pump in nearby Medlar Road. It was recently within living memory that some carters made their horses comfortable for the night before climbing the ladder to their own sleeping quarters in the hay-loft above the stable. An interesting point about the thorn bush which grows in the garden of the first cottage is that it entitles the occupant under a very old law to brew and sell ale on the premises on one day of the year.

Diagonally opposite this row of cottages stands Coplow House. It has a long history of being a farm in bygone days and details of the present building can be traced to the 16th century. The grounds house a magnificent barn recorded as being there '33 years into the reign of Elizabeth I'. We

can therefore safely say that it was being used in 1591. It can be viewed from Catherine Close which is entered from the High Street via a small opening in the wall facing Horne's Corner.

Return to Horne's Corner and continue along the Faringdon Road for a few yards. On your right is Medlar Cottage, so called because of the medlar trees that once grew there. It was the home of Dr Nicholls at the end of the nineteenth century. Next to Medlar Cottage stands Barnacle Lodge which was built in the 1830s and served as a gate-lodge to Beckett House.

Tarifa Cottage is much older, originating in the 17th century. It stands below the level of the road and until the houses in Days Ground and Common Close were built in 1953, this cottage was on the very edge of the village. For many years an outside wall carried the following notice:

'By order of the magistrates all idle or disorderly persons found and apprehended in the Parish of Shrivenham will accordingly be removed as the law directs.'

The original hooks for this notice are still hanging on the wall.

On the opposite side of the road on the corner of Claypits Lane stands Wisteria Cottage another dwelling whose origins are 17th century. It used to be two cottages until fairly modern times. Continue along Claypits Lane.



Wisteria Cottage



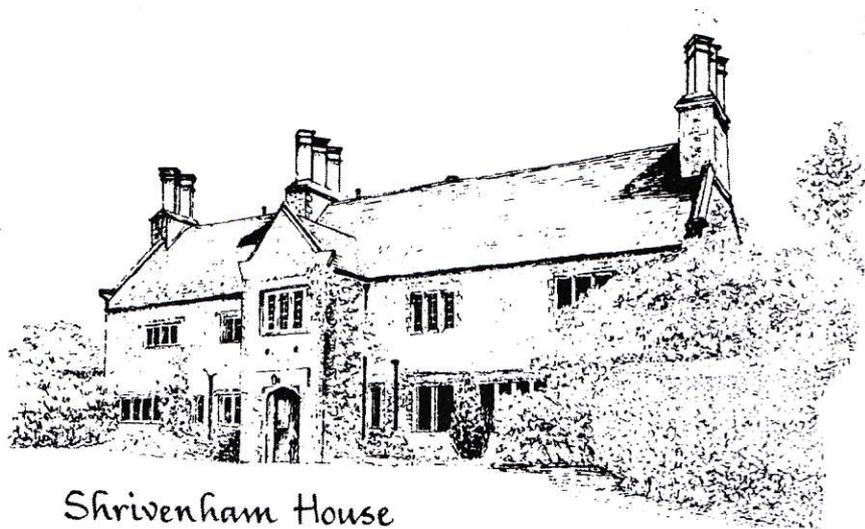
Normanby Cottage

Normanby Cottage on the right is late Georgian and was the home for 40 years of one of our first medical practitioners, Dr A G Parker who lived and practised here from 1847 to 1887. The 1881 census records him as a 'surgeon in practice'. Dr McNamara also lived here before moving to Elm Tree House in 1925.



### Old Almshouses

The Almshouses, also on the right, were endowed in 1641, about the time of the Civil War by Sir Henry Marten who lived in Beckett House. They were extensively remodelled in the 19th century and the two at the east end were added by Archdeacon Berens at his own expense. During the last century one of these cottages was made available rent-free for the parish nurse on condition that she looked after the other residents in times of ill-health. By the mid 1930s however, these dwellings were condemned by the local Doctor as being unfit for habitation. The Trustees decided to sell them and to invest the proceeds in the four new Almshouses in Marten's Road which were built in 1954 with all modern conveniences. Until recently a well stood by the front doors of two of the cottages.



*Shrivenham House*

Enter the churchyard. Over the wall on the left is Shrivenham House. This was the Dower House to Beckett House and, extensively altered and extended in 1834, is similar in style. The original 17th century house was a two storey building fronting west. A wing projecting east was built in the 18th century from the north wall and the house was made rectangular by the renovations in 1834.

As you walk through the churchyard you will see a little gem of a cottage on the west side. This is Jasmine Cottage, listed as 17th century, and which was once the home of the schoolmistress who taught in the Dame School close by from 1803 to 1863. Immediately in front of Jasmine Cottage is the Church Room which was built as a Dame School in 1803.



Largely constructed around a 15th century tower in the reign of Charles II between 1660 and 1665, St Andrew's Church has been described as an 'architectural curiosity' since it combines two styles. Each side wall has six long Perpendicular-style windows and there are Norman-style arches on each side of the nave. Look for the inscription and the date 1720 on the sundial on the south wall as you enter the church. Look, too, for what are thought to be the remains of the 13th century church built into the 17th century church in the west wall. Other traces of history include the 13th century font above which in the central window are again thought to be 13th century projections that support a small arch.

The oak panelling on the walls is largely 17th century but the pews are Victorian, The walls are plainly dressed with squares of soft chalk from the nearby Downs. Throughout the church are memorials to members of the Barrington family. In the north-west corner stands a memorial to Admiral of the White, the Hon Samuel Barrington, who seized the French



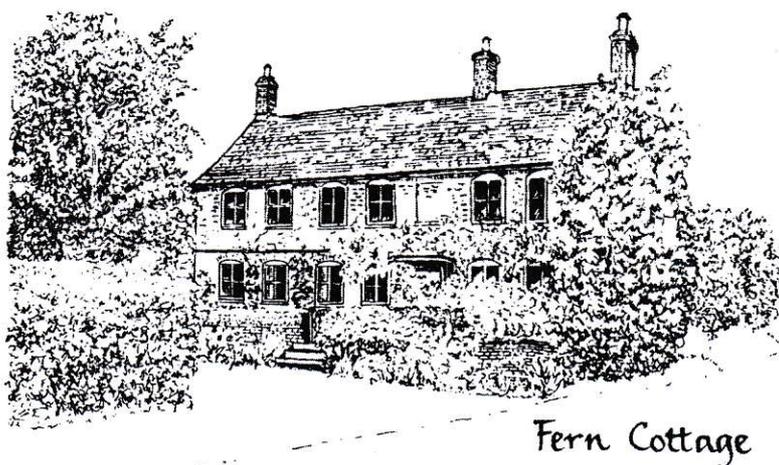
*St. Andrew's Church*

ship 'Count de Florentine' in 1759 off St Lucia in the West Indies. The white flag of the French ship is remarkably captured in white marble. There is a plaque on the south wall to Benjamin Disraeli, a frequent visitor to Beckett House. He was a friend of the 7th Viscount who was his Secretary and who erected this brass memorial.

The church plate contains several treasures, among which are a silver Elizabethan chalice of 1577 and an early 16th century chalice. The tower contains a ring of ten bells of which two bear the date 1701 and another two were given by the American servicemen who were stationed in Shrivensham in 1944. Today an enthusiastic team of bell-ringers regularly practises each Monday evening and also rings for Sunday services and weddings.

Church House is situated to the north of the church and is listed as having been built in the 17th century with 19th century additions. It is speculated that this may have been the site of the Abbot's house since this part of Claypits Lane was called Abbot's Walk.

Leave St Andrews by the path close to the Church Room. This path, locally known as Bugs Alley, runs between the gardens of Elm Tree House and Manor Cottages which were built about 1650. As you emerge from Bugs Alley turn left and you will see Fern Cottage on your right whose garden is surrounded by a wall 12 feet high. It dates from the early 18th century. A blocked window at the front reminds us that under a law of 1696, there was a tax on windows; it was eventually repealed in 1851.



Now re-trace your steps up Manor Lane, past Manor Cottages which were built in about 1650, and you are now facing what was the entrance to a Manor House. Older residents recall Mr Amariah Fairthorne, a former owner of this Manor in the 1920s. Part of the original wall was left standing when the house was demolished in 1966 to make way for the small development in Manor Close.

Still in Manor Lane, bear left past the entrance to the Recreation Ground with its avenue of horse chestnuts. On your left is Dodds Row, a row of cottages listed as 18th century. Old Thatch a little further on is older still, being listed as having 17th century origins. The wells that used to serve these cottages were in line with the pump outside Pump Cottages opposite the Memorial Hall, and the old Almshouses in Claypits Lane. This suggests the course of an underground stream.



*Memorial Hall*

Continue now to the end of Manor Lane and on your right will be the Memorial Hall. This, with its lovely hammerbeam roof, was spoken of as one of the finest buildings of its kind in the whole of the south of England when it was opened by Princess Beatrice in 1925. It was built as a result of Lady Barrington's tireless efforts to raise funds to provide a lasting

memorial to those Shrivenham men who perished in the First World War. A model of the architect's design can be seen in the Parish Clerk's office.

Opposite the Memorial Hall are the four Pump Cottages, reputedly built in the reign of Queen Anne and formerly called Well Cottages on account of their proximity to the main village well. The well, positioned on the triangle of grass between the cottages and the Memorial Hall, provided water not only for the cottagers but also for any passing drover and his animals. The village pump was restored in 1993 and is positioned close to its original site. A village pound is quite a rare sight these days and we are lucky to have our pound opposite the pump on the right hand side as you now return along the High Street. The pound was used for holding animals that had strayed and they were only released on payment of a fine. The pound has a preservation order on it.

Now return along the High Street towards the centre of the village. You will see Northam House on the right. In the mid 19th century the American preacher Moody Spurgeon held a revivalist meeting on this site. Supporters pitched their tents at the back of the two cottages that used to stand near here.

Blacksmith's Cottage is on the right; it is possibly 250 years old and until the 1930s was where the local horses came to be shod. It is more than likely that the present house was built on the site of an earlier building as suggested by the date on the cottage door. Just beyond and diagonally opposite are several more cottages. The width of their walls suggests they were built about the same time as the church in the 17th century.

The Methodist Chapel on the left was built by Mr Wiltshire of Swindon and opened in 1860. Until then, services were held in three local farmhouses.

It was originally intended to erect the Chapel adjacent to one of the entrances to Beckett House. Lord Barrington, however, intervened and donated the present site and all the building stone; he was also involved in the provision of the Anglican churches in Bourton (opened 1850) and Watchfield (opened 1856). It is a noteworthy achievement by two local organists, Mr Joseph Knapp and Mrs Nellie Penny, that they played the organ here for a period of over 110 years.

On the corner of the High Street and Stainswick Lane stands Ivy House, possibly late 18th century in origin. It was once a farm. Notice the large ammonite in the east wall in Stainswick Lane. A few yards down Stainswick Lane is the row of dwellings called Coronation Cottages, being built in 1911. Close to them stands The Old House with about 250 years of history. Earlier last century it was called Walnut Tree House on account of its fine walnut trees.

Back in the High Street and standing opposite the entrance to Stainswick Lane is a pair of imposing thatched cottages listed as 18th century. They were extensively restored in 1912. Continue your walk past the present Post Office to the school and the School House. Mr William Knapp said he understood that before the school was built on the land donated by Lord Barrington a six-gabled house stood there. This was called Courtney Cottage and was taken down to make way for the new school which was built by his great, great uncle who was also called Mr William Knapp and who had helped to build both Bourton and Watchfield churches in the middle of the last century. Built in 1863 in the Gothic style the school was extended in 1899. Further extensions were made in the 1960s with the addition of the large school hall and two more classrooms, and again earlier this century.



## Primary School

Opposite the school and adjacent to the newsagent is The White House. It is described as having 17th century origins and was originally two dwellings. A Deed dated 1658, the year Oliver Cromwell died, shows the transfer of ownership from Sir John Wildman of Beckett. A century later documents show that the then Vicar, of Shrivenham, Barfoot Colton, bought the house. However it is not certain that he actually lived there. What is certain is that the name The White House was in use in 1658 since it is recorded. The bricks in the centre chimney are of a size consistent with those made prior to 1700 and which were not made after that date. The White House used to be detached; at the end of the 19th century a shop and a cottage were adjoined.

Elm Tree House dates back to about 1700 when additions were possibly made to an earlier house. The rear of the house is considerably older than the front. The portico is Palladian in style and was built about 1780. Little is known of the history of the house but it is thought that the outbuildings on the site of the new surgery complex were once used as a candle factory.

The village green used to be immediately in front of the house, and the terrace was well situated for watching the local activities. The old village pond was on the opposite side of the green, between what is now Kidson-Trigg and the new Vicarage.

Close to where the village pond and green were, can still be seen today two cottages listed as 18th century in origin. It is quite possible that they were built on the site of older cottages. They stand between two Vicarages. On the left is Archdeacon Berens' former residence which is said to have been built at his own expense in 1804, with a mid 19th century addition on the east side. It has since become two dwellings. The present Vicarage on the right was built in 1985.

This is the end of the organised part of your exploration of Shrivvenham. We hope that you have enjoyed it and are stimulated to find out more about this delightful and friendly English village.



## Of Days Long Ago

Of cottage snug, and gardens neat,  
Of sunsets red on Winters nights,  
Of mist round ponds in Autumn,  
Of Christmas in the village shop,  
or grand bazaar as it was known;  
Of bargains bought with pennies saved,  
Of snuff for Gran, a comb for Mum;  
Of Spring with hedges green,  
Of giant elms, budding faintly red;  
Of cowslips, sweet beneath your feet,  
Of bread and cheese, picked from the thorn;  
Of horsey smells in hayfields sweet,  
Of cider as a special treat,  
Of autumn reds, its musty smell  
Of conkers, bonfires and apples scrumped,  
Of accents familiar and faces we knew,  
Of a greeting that said "How bist you"  
Of hand bells played in village pubs,  
Of Christmas parties in village halls,  
Of rainwater butts, (rainwater's good for your hair)  
Of paraffin lamps, and candles to bed;  
Of frost patterns inside windows on morning cold,  
Of trips to Southsea by "Knapps" coach;  
Of dreams of travel across the sea,  
Of morning in school thick with smoke,  
from a tortoise stove filled up with coke.  
Of holidays long, that never ended;  
Of punts on lakes and muddy knees;  
Of all these things I often dream.

**Vic Day**

### **Ballad for the White Horse**

What have you seen, you old White Horse?

Watching over your valley.

Battle and anger, sorrow and pain,  
Angle and Saxon, Viking and Dane,  
Then after the clamour - silence again.  
Peace, in your lovely valley.

What do you see, you old White Horse?

Watching over your valley.

Sheep on the hillside, sunshine and rain,  
Grasses and flowers, blossoms and grain,  
Oh, may man's hand not scar it again,  
Spoiling your lovely valley.

What will you see, you old White Horse?

Watching over your valley.

When we are gone, will you still remain?  
Proud and aloof, alone to reign,  
Unchanged and unchanging, watching again,  
Over an empty valley?  
Watching over your valley?

**Eileen Jessey**