

This is life in the 1930's in Shrivenham

By Cyril Frank (Bill) Forty

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I was born in Wantage at Brook Cottage the home of my gran, as my mum was from Wantage, but my dad's home was in Shrivenham where he was born. So we moved to Shrivenham sometime in the first six months of my life.

We lived in what was known as 'Knapps Rooms' which is a three story building between the now Post Office and the Ladies Hairdressers and we lived on the top story. How long we lived there I don't know for certain. But from about three years old I can remember living at 49 Station Cottages. These were cottages behind the Victoria Pub, now the Fat Dog, a disgusting name for a pub.

The landlord of the pub was a Robert Brickell, he was a big man who originally came from London, as well as a landlord he was a general dealer he had four sons and two daughters. The two I mostly knew was Tom and later Bill.

Bob Brickell had the shed which is beside the pub and still is there. Also at top of the pub yard were stables and coach house. He had driving horses. The first time I went to Swindon by road was in a horse and trap with my dad and Tom Brickell to the market in Old Town. There were dozens of horses and traps there like there would be cars now.

I remember well my dad buying a hen with a brood of ducklings. When they all grew up no doubt they finished up in dinners. Times were hard in the thirties as the country was still in a depression. I spent a lot of time with my dad as he was in and out of work a lot at that time, as were most men in Shrivenham. My dad worked a day here a week there, he worked in the railway a couple of times but in those days the works would sack the workers they could do without for six months, so as to pay the shareholders out. My dad worked on Shrivenham station when the platforms were altered to let the stopping trains come off the main line.

My brother Jack was born in November 1932.

My dad used to do a lot of rabbiting with ferrets you would sell a few rabbits as country folks ate a lot of rabbits. It was quite a cheap meal at Ninepence each then you could get Thrupence for the shin when the rag-bone man came round. His name was Jimmy Wheeler he came from Highworth on a horse and cart.

We did not have any 'mod cons' in those days. No electric, no gas, no running water and the bog was half way up the garden, not a place you spent much time in when it was cold.

We had three neighbours, the one next door was either 'Wheeler or Weaver' but I know the next one was Fred Weston and his family, the next one was Charlie Painter and his family. Originally in that row there were seven cottages, one up, one down but at that time two were made into one, except for the end one where the 'painters' lived, that one remained just two rooms. It must have been a bit crowded as they had four kids. The one named Eileen was nicknamed 'Riby' as she always liked the ribs of a rabbit! Her older brother Bill's nickname was 'rashers' but I don't know how he got that. I often went with him before I started school. We used to go off first thing in the morning, often it was cold and frosty, the rabbits bolted better on a frosty morning.

We used to ferret on Len Knapps farm, Cowleaze, which was opposite where we lived at the station. He was called 'Riney' Knapp quite a mean character, but then most farmers were, the rabbits were caught on a 50/50 basis, my dad used to hock them and hang them on the hedge for Riney to see when he came

round to check which he did often. But at that young age, I remember dad burying the first couple to go back and collect later.

I started school sometime in 1934. I seem to remember it was before I was five, so it could have been after the summer or Christmas holidays. My uncle John who was about fifteen months older than me was already going to school so I went with him because I lived with Gran all the week, I was too young to walk from the station cottages on my own which was a mile. Gran used to take me home on Friday evenings.

Gran lived in church cottages behind the church in Claypits Lane. The neighbours were Ernie Richens, Mrs Reeves, Jake Anger and Myle Dancsen. Also, Frank Cox lived round there he was the milkman in the village. He delivered the milk in an old car with the back seat taken out. He delivered milk to us at the station. George 'Bubbles' Barrett worked for him as a boy. The milk was brought to the door in a bucket they had a pint and a half pint measure and it was put into your jug. There were also fields around there, one was called Common Close and the other was Days Ground belonging to a little farm with a cow shed behind Coxes Dairy. Charlie Hatheral milked cows, John and I used to go round there when he was milking.

Gran and Grampy moved from there in 1936 when eight council houses were built in Stalpits Road, there were already eight at the bottom of the road and four at the top, the tenants moved into them in 1933. Gramp had Percy Knapp's horse and wagon to move the belongings. It was a covered wagon that was used to bring the small children and girls from Watchfield to Shrivenham School. It was also used to take the older girls to Bourton for cookery lessons, but the boys had to walk to Bourton for Carpentry.

It was quite interesting living near the station as it was a hive of activity in those days. The milk was still put on the railway from the neighbouring farms. Cattle and sheep came there to be loaded on the trains also lots of horses travelled by train. Racehorses were fun and games to get them loaded, the grooms travelled with them in the horsebox when they returned from racing. There would be some oats left in the mangers that we collected for our chickens.

About this time the pub changed hands, the Brickells moved up to the village in the High Street where the Barbers and Hairdressers are now. The Barbers was the garage for that property, so it was ideal for old man Brickell to do his wheeling and dealing. Charlie Clark was the Landlord they had two children, Brian and Doris.

Being boys we loved the railway, we would spend a lot of time over there, some of the porters and goods yard men would let us over there provided we behaved and the station master had gone home. At that time the station master was Mr Hacket, he lived in the station masters' house the other side of the line on the Bourton Road. In the winter they had to put lamps out, the lamps were all different types of Tilly lamps they ran on paraffin and pumped up with air. There was a lamp shed in the yard where they were kept, some of the porters would let us help them put them out, mostly on wire rope attached to a pulley and you pulled them up in their position. The goods yard was down the bottom end of the station the man in charge there was Bert Tilling. In the evening a Shunter engine would come out from Swindon and bring some tracks out with goods for the Shrivenham area including the coal trucks for the coal yard which was run by Toomers of Swindon, sometimes the driver would let us have a ride on the engine if we took an onion they could have with their bread and cheese for supper.

The coal yard was run by a man called Fred Miles, he lived in Watchfield. He was quite a friendly chap he didn't mind us going over to the coal yard provided we didn't get into mischief.

At that time there were four coal merchants who went to the yard for coal six days a week, three horse and carts and one lorry. One was Tommy Adams, he delivered coal to Watchfield. Another was Jack Enstone, he delivered his coal around Shrivenham. His yard was in Hazels Lane. Then there was Jack Lucker, he worked for Kents, at Manor Farm, Bourton. The coal man with the lorry came from upon the hills, I think it was Bishopstone or Ashbury, sometimes he delivered Shrivenham way, if we were walking to school he would stop and give us a lift. His name was Brany Johnson.

The Barracks at Beckett was started in the late 1930s, extra Lorries were brought to the goods yard to haul bricks for the building which came by rail. This was great for us, we would help load the bricks when we were off school then we could go to Beckett in the lorry. The contractor building the barracks was John Knox. The workers came from all over the country as there would not be enough trades men locally. A lot of the workers lodged in the village, we had several with us at times. We had one Scotsman in particular for quite a long time, his name was Bill Reid. He stayed with us right up until the war started he was a reservist so he was called up first, that was the last we heard of him.

When the barracks were finished, it was used for training NCO's for officers known as Cadets. I'm not sure how long the course was but it had to be at least two months. Our front room was vacant when the workers went home so mother let it to the cadets at weekends to have their wives down.

With the cadets finally passing out as officers, military tailors sprung up all over the village because when the cadets passed out they would need a dress uniform.

By now the Second World War was well in progress, rationing had started the present day folks would not survive on what we had to live on other than the basic ration we had to queue for anything extra.