

Notes by
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SHRIVENHAM *

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Shriv. Local History
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The earliest men and women of this area lived on the hill tops, hunting for their food and finding water in the local springs, the water level of these springs was for some unknown reason much higher at that time. Over the years the hill families gradually came to live on the lower ground, hunting, domesticating animals and setting up simple settlements. This is how Shrivenham came into existence.

There is a great deal of evidence of the activities of our ancestors in this district. Burial mounds such as Seven Barrows, prehistoric camps and forts of which Uffington, Hardwell and Liddington castles are good examples. The Blowing Stone at Kingston Lisle is famous and was used so legend says in primitive times as a warning of an enemy's approach producing a dull moaning sound audible at a distance of 5 or 6 miles a sort of ancient siren. Wayland Smith's Cave, a 4000 year old burial mound on the downs near Ashbury is said to mark the spot where Wayland the Smith shod horses, made flying horse-shoes and invincible swords at his legendary forge. This monument is currently being reconstructed for the Ministry of Works by a team led by Professor Stuart Piggott (Daily Telegraph, July 14th, 1962, p.13).

It has been suggested that the White Horse is a memorial of the Battle of Ashdown 871 A.D., but this is unlikely for two reasons. The Horse was probably constructed between B.C. 100 - A.D. 100 as a tribal emblem, and Ashdown Hill is only one of the many possible sites for Alfred's battle. It is interesting however to speculate that men from Shrivenham fought with Alfred against the Danes.

The remains of a Roman villa have been discovered in the last few years at Woolstone and investigated by local people. In 1903 a hoard of Roman coins was discovered in a brook in Little Wellington Woods (now known as Bowers Copse) at the Longcot end of the College. This was at that time part of Beckett Estate and the coins were presented by Lord Barrington to the British Museum. They are now in the Salisbury Museum.

The first authentic mention of Shrivenham is in various Anglo-Saxon charters. There is a great deal of variation in the form and spelling of the name. It appears in charters, deeds and registers as Scriuenanhem (821 A.D. the earliest mention), Seriveham (11th century), Schriveham (12th century), Sherevenham, Sryvenham Sortiveham (13th century), to mention just a few of the forms. Various suggestions have been made as to the meaning, Dr Skeat in his Berkshire Place-names (1911) interprets it as 'Scrifena's enclosure' - Scrifena denoting a person; at one time it was popularly held that the explanation was to be found in Shriving - Shriving - h. A definite interpretation is however not feasible, because of the variation in meaning of Anglo-Saxon words.

Shrivenham was a fairly important place before the compilation of the Domesday Book, but it is with this record that the first real account of the village is given.

The Domesday Book states that:-

"The King holds Scrivenham in demesne (that is as a personal estate), King Edward held it. There are 46 hides (a hide was an era of land sufficient for a normal family, approximately 120 acres). There is land for 35 ploughs and there 80 villeins and 17 borderers with 30 ploughs In the Manor are two mills worth 20 shillings, and 240 acres of meadow and woodland to render (sic) 20 swine".

The population would be about 380 and the land valued at about £45.

It is difficult to write a short account of village life in Shrivenham through the centuries, and the following description merely touches on the more interesting items.

Life naturally followed the feudal pattern of service to the Lords of the Manor, the Church being the centre of community life. The Parson granted licenses, performed a variety of local government duties (these were later taken over by the Parish Vestry), assisted by the Church Wardens. The registers maintained by the Churches of births, marriages and deaths are a major source of history, the Shrivenham registers date back to 1575.

A monastery may have existed at one time in or near the village, but there is no real evidence to support its existence. The original 5 hides of land mentioned in the Domesday Survey as belonging to the Church in Shrivenham were granted to the Abbey of Cirencester by Henry I, and in 1346 the Abbot had a house in the village. There are certainly two local legends connected with a monastery, one of a nun in love with a monk who drowned herself in a well (Nun's Well or Maiden's Well) at the junction of the Watchfield and Faringdon Roads. The other of the monk who haunts the churchyard on All Saints Eve.

Shrivenham in the Middle Ages was obviously a lively place, for in 1469 a commission was sent "to arrest William Brown of Shrevenham and others, to bring them before the King in council to answer for certain riots". Retribution was definitely meted out to rogues and vagabonds here, for in addition to the cross that once stood in the village centre, there was also a Whipping Post. Due warning, however was given, because for many years the following notice hung on the wall of Tarifa cottage.

"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".

Shrivenham also had its village green, where many local activities took place. A favourite spot from which to watch the amusements was the terrace in front of Elm Tree House (Dr. Spark's House). It is also interesting to note in connection with this fine house that part of it was once a candle factory (the part that is now the waiting room of the surgery). The village pond was opposite the school and apparently served as a convenient place to dump dead dogs, cats and broken pots. The original village inn, the King's Arms, was also near here on the site of Mr. Benford's shop. The village Pound was appropriately enough near the present police station and was a source of revenue, as fines were extracted from the owners of straying sheep and cattle.

The Berks. and Wilts. Canal, which passed to the south of Shrivenham was built in 1793 to deal with the increasing flow of traffic to and from Reading. It seems to have brought prosperity to the local smith, because on some days he apparently shod as many as 70 barge horses in a day and the queue of horses stretched from the

smithy to outside the village. It is also recorded that a man called Horne had a blacksmith's shop at the corner near the present Prince of Wales Inn thus accounting for the name of Horne's Corner.

Local pleasures were few and even if not quite as sophisticated as today's nevertheless greatly enjoyed. Shrivenham seems to have had a reputation for horseplay with its village feasts and local contests. The village favourite was climbing a greasy pole to get the leg of mutton at the top. The pole was inserted in the hub of a wagon wheel to make it more difficult. Bourton people had a very poor opinion of Shrivenham and refused to take part in Shrivenham's fun. Bourton preferred the more genteel occupation of dancing competitions with prizes not for dancing but for the prettiest lace cap. Watchfield appears to have had a reputation for laziness as the following local rhyme seems to suggest:-

"Shrivenham Revel and Bourton Rout
The Watchfield pot boils and the fire is out".

One of the last Maypoles in Berkshire was still in being at Lngcot in the middle of the last century. The Vicar eventually had it broken up, because the local village boys fought so fiercely to remove or restore it to their own village.

The most famous was without doubt the scouring or clearing of the White Horse, this was paid for by the Barringtons for many years. It was famous throughout the county (as many as 30,000 people attended) for its games of cheese rolling, back swords and wrestling. Naturally there was great local rivalry, but teams came from as far away as Somerset to compete. The last one took place in 1875. The Festival was commemorated by the following old Berkshire Ballad:-

"The Owld White Horse wants setten to rights,
And the squire hev promised good cheer,
So we'll gie un a scrape to kip up in shape,
And a'll last for many a year.

A was made a lang langtime ago,
Wi a good dale o' labour and pains,
By King Alferd the Great when he spwiled their consate,
And caddled they woshirds the Danes.

The Bleawin Stwun in days gone by
 Wur King Alferd's bugle barn,
 And the tharnin tree you med plainly see,
 As is called King Alferd's tharn.

There'll be backsword play, and elimin the powl,
 And a race for a pig and a cheese,
 And us thinks as hisn's a dummell zowl,
 As dwon't care for zich spwoorts as these".

The Domesday Survey mentions a church in Shrivenham with 5 hides of land, and states that what the priest hath is worth £4. A later account of a church in Shrivenham is in a deed of agreement between the Abbot and Convent of Cirencester in the year 1395. The present church with the exception of the tower and a portion of the west wall which are probably 12th century, was built in the 17th century during the reign of Charles II (1660-85) by Sir Henry Marten and cost £4000. The present vicarage was built by Archdeacon Barends who was the Incumbent 1804-59. It is worthy of note that local vicars must be attached to the village because at one period Shrivenham had only three (the Reverends Barends, Murray and Hill) in 130 years.

The history of any village is largely bound up with the history of the manor. Shrivenham originally composed of four manors and the estate known as Fowersmill. The manors were:-

1. Shrivenham Salop
2. Shrivenham Stalpits
3. The Manor of Becket
4. The Rectory Manor.

The manors eventually all became part of the Beckett Estate. Salop Manor once belonged to the Earl of Pembroke, Stalpits Manor to the Earl of Salisbury, and the Rectory Manor to the Pleydells, a prominent Coleshill and Watchfield family.

The estate known as Fowersmill (now Friar's Mill) originated in a grant made in 1188 by King Henry II to Reynold le Fouwer (Focarius, or Stoker) of land to the value of 25s. 4d. in Shrivenham. This land was held by Reynold and his descendants by service of making the fire in the King's chamber. The tenure was later altered

to the presentation of two white capons whenever the King crossed over the Fowersmill bridge (now Friar's Mill bridge on the Shrivenham/Highworth Road) with the remark "Behold Sire these two white capons which you shall have another time but not now". This condition of service has probably never been fulfilled, because there is no record of any crossing by a Sovereign. The estate came into the possession of John de Becket in 1367 and was sold by his heir of the same name in 1376 to John Warneford and was the property of the Warnefords until 1902.

In 1086 the Manor of Becote was held by William, Count of Evreux, a Norman. Later it returned to the King. King John was actually in residence in 1204, the Manor was probably some sort of hunting lodge. Passing on to more recent times; in 1633 the Manor was bought by Sir Henry Marten, a judge. He was a man of considerable fortune and in 1642 with his son established a charity in the village by building the Almshouses. The charity originally consisted of eight houses and in 1850 Archdeacon Berens completed the Founders scheme by building two additional houses.

Harry Marten, the judge's son, seems to have been a character. He was renowned throughout the vale for his wild orgies, ably supported by the men of Watchfield. His favourite pastimes were said to be drinking with the servants and wenching. This is rather curious as he was certainly a regicide, one of the men who tried Charles I and signed the death warrant. After the restoration he surrendered to the King and was condemned to death, however, he managed to get himself reprieved and later died in Chepstow prison.

In 1652 the Beckett estates were bought by Sir George Pratt of Coleshill and then in 1665 by John Wildman. Wildman had "a life of intrigue during the Commonwealth and three subsequent reigns". He was made Postmaster-General in 1689 and died in 169

His son, John Wildman, adopted John Shute as his heir, who on becoming heir to Francis Barrington, took that name in 1716. Shute was a barrister, a distinguished politician and theologian whose tenets were those of the 'Prestbyterian dissenters'. He was expelled from the Commons for promoting a fraudulent lottery. This incident does not seem to have effected his career though, for shortly afterwards he was

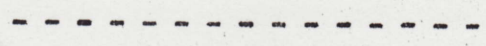
created a baron in the Irish peerage.

Several of the first Viscount Barrington's sons had distinguished careers. The eldest was successively Secretary of the Admiralty, Secretary of War, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Treasurer of the the Navy. His fifth son was an admiral of the White and a General of Marines, and his sixth son became Bishop of Durham.

A number of court posts were held by the seventh Viscount who was created a baron in the U.K. peerage in the 1860's. He was a friend and patron of Disraeli who was a frequent visitor to Beckett Hall. The first Viscount's successors in the title held the Manor until 1925 when it was sold by the ninth Viscount. The War Department bought Beckett in 1936.

Turning to the house itself, there had been a house on the site from well before the Conquest. It is difficult to say what the earliest buildings were like. The de Becket family probably lived in a hall-and-solar type manor house, secure but not fortified and made of stone. The Tudor house was partly destroyed by fire as was the church. The 18th century house, a mixture of earlier remains, was probably removed to make way for the present building. Until the 1780's the roads ran close to the house but were realigned to ensure the privacy of the park. In fact, before the realignment, the Inigo Jones summerhouse on the terrace was a favourite place for Lord Barrington's guests to view the stage coach as it went through the ford at that spot.

The present house was built for the sixth Viscount between 1831-34. The architect was William Atkinson who strangely enough was also architect to the Board of Ordnance and designer of several buildings at Woolwich and the Tower of London. The restoration of this building begun by the War Department in 1960 has been completed successfully and the house restored to its original appearance.



It has only been possible to give a brief history in these notes. Much valuable and interesting information can be found in the following books and articles:-

- Hill, E.F. - A record of the Parish of Shrivenham, Berkshire.
Privately printed 1928
(A copy of this book is available for reference in
the College Library)
- Walford, E. - Tourist's Guide to Berkshire. Stanford, 1882
- Jowitt, R.L.P. - Berkshire and Oxfordshire, Penguin Books, 1950
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