

# THE OLD MANOR HOUSE SHRIVENHAM

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*By David Moore*

In September 1963, as a young Second Lieutenant in the British Army, I arrived at the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS), Shrivenham to commence a degree course. Shortly afterwards I was married. In those days, officers under the age of 26 were not entitled to a married quarter so I managed to obtain a rented thatched cottage in the beautiful little village of Bishopstone. The following year we had a baby and, as my wife Janet did not drive, decided to move to a larger village with more shops. With considerable help from the RMCS Housing and Administration Officer, Lt-Col Jennings-Bramley (Ret'd.), in late 1964 we found a flat in *The Old Manor House* at the end of Manor Lane, Shrivenham.

The property was surrounded by a large stone wall part of which is still there. The entrance was directly in-line with Manor Lane where there is now an electricity sub-station. There was a huge holly tree by the entrance and you turned left on to a gravelled area in front of the house where you could park several cars. From the outside, the large house appeared to consist of three parts. There were two wings, one at each end with gabled ends facing the walled entrance. The right-hand one had a large chimney in front of it. In the centre, between the two wings, the main entrance was a large, open-ended, pitched-roof porch leading into a hallway. Above ground level were two more floors. The top floor was at roof level and had three dormer-windows piercing the roof with their mini gable ends protruding to the front (see attached photograph).

Inside there were four self-contained living areas. The Manor House owner lived in the right wing on all three levels. His name was a Major <sup>EYRE-WILLIAMS</sup> ~~Roberts~~ (Ret'd.) - I think? He had a wooden leg and a very friendly black Labrador dog. The central part of the house together with the left wing was made into three flats for young officers from the RMCS. We moved into the first floor flat which was accessed via stairs in the hallway. In the bottom flat, leading directly off the hallway, we soon met a Lieutenant called Peter and his wife Sheila. He is now a retired Major-General. On the top floor lived Lieutenant Tony and his wife Avril. He was disabled as a result of sliding off a cliff top on wet grass and breaking both legs but had recovered enough to carry on serving in the Army.

Initially, we were shown around the property by the charming outgoing tenant, Brian Fox, also an Army Officer but of more senior rank. He was in the same Corps as me, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), and I believe that he was moving on to an official married quarter in Majors Road, Watchfield. After entering the flat from the stairs, there was a long corridor, off which there were two bedrooms. At the end of the corridor there were a few steps up to the left wing where there was a bright and airy living / dining room, a small kitchen and a bathroom / lavatory.

Before writing this trip down memory lane, I contacted my now ex-wife, Janet, to see what she could remember from those days. Much of what follows is thanks to her input for which I am very grateful. By the way, the baby, Julie, is now nearly 49 with two children of her own. The furniture in the flat was a bit of a mixture. There were at least two antique pieces - a Captain's Chair in one of

the bedrooms and a very handsome Chessboard Table about 4ft X 1ft 6in. In the living room there was an Art Deco sofa and some very utilitarian table and chairs. In the kitchen, the cooker ran off a Calor gas cylinder which used to run out at the most awkward times. Janet remembers having to go outside to the washing lines which were in the rear part of the walled garden. There, she saw her first ever Chaffinch which thrilled her. There was a lovely orchard as well as a not-so-nice incinerator. On the Major's side of the house was a well-kept Croquet Lawn.

There were some amusing memories at The Manor House. The walls were very thin and we could every word of the couples upstairs and downstairs when they were arguing. Some of the comments were funny to us although I am sure they did not think so. There was the time we could not sleep because of the noise of what sounded like animals stampeding in the roof. We went upstairs to see Tony, a nervous wreck smoking like a chimney, and Avril nearly hysterical. It transpired that that some rats had built a nest in the hollow walls around the top flat. When we called in the pest controller, he found a perfectly circular nest about 18in diameter just inside the space. Thank goodness he managed to eliminate them. Janet remembers the day day several cows found their way into the front garden and it was difficult to get them out. One day we came home and the Major (as we used to call him) was up the ladder doing some maintenance. We had to admire the way he balanced on the rungs with his wooden leg. Another time I was in the front garden cleaning the car. Baby Julie was asleep in the pram. Some very persistent Jehovah's Witnesses were attempting to convert me to their cause. I am very sorry to say that I ended up swearing at them. Overall it was a memorable time as the weather that year was sunny, there were lots of flowers, the bees were humming and the Major's chickens were running free.

In those days the village had far more shops. Janet remembers a bakery, a wool shop and a chemist. Also, a grocer near to the Doctor's which once had maggoty bacon. I seem to remember that we entered Elm Tree Surgery through the gate and up the steps but I am not sure. I think that there was a Dr <sup>Dunne</sup> ~~Crockett~~ there but it was a long time ago. I used to have my car serviced at The Hut Garage, run by the Kettle brothers, near Station Road turn-off. Further down was The Swan Hill garage. I used to buy my petrol at the Jet Station in Watchfield. There was no bypass and the road through the centre of Shrivenham was the main road. The College (as we called the RMCS) was very different. We used to walk down to Beckett Lake and feed the ducks. There was no fence around the College in the days before 1969 and the IRA offensive. Everywhere was accessible to the public. We often used the main entrance (now closed) near Axis Road, Watchfield if we were going to Robert's Hall or College Hall. We also used the NAAFI in Watchfield (now a church). The Prince of Wales pub, as now, was a favourite for College students. Sir Donald Bailey, of wartime Bailey bridge fame, was still the Dean. Janet and I were once invited to a garden party which we think was in the grounds of his house.

The time we spent in *The Old Manor House, Shrivenham* was extremely interesting and enjoyable. In late 1965, after about 18 months living there, we moved out. The Army relaxed its rules on age restriction and provided us with a married quarter in Folly Crescent, Watchfield.