

## Memories of Shrivenham, by Sheila Turner

I was born to Daisy and Sidney Philipps in 1930 in Swindon and I moved to Shrivenham when I was 3 years old. My father was a signalman on the Great Western Railway and worked in the signal box at the Shrivenham/Ashbury Road crossing, as did his father before him. In my early childhood Shrivenham was a small agricultural village dominated by the Barringtons who lived in Beckett House. I remember that my father used to cycle to work along the A420 to Shrivenham. He loved his job as a signalman but the Doctor had advised him on account of his health not to cycle to work. At the time very few people had cars and this was a problem for us. However due to the kindness of Mr Thomas who owned the farm near the signal box and also a lovely new house near the railway line in the Ashbury Road (this was re-named Stainswick Lane in the 1960s) our problem was solved. Mr Thomas rented us one of the two cottages just over the railway line and father could now walk to his work. We lived there until I was 7 years old. My father loved helping the farmer to gather in the harvest and in later years took our black grumpy mongrel, Nigger, not a name we would use now, and Chippy born under the chip pan in the transport café at Swan Hill. He was another mongrel bit of a much better disposition and would catch the rats which ran out of the hay fields.

Knapps the Shrivenham builders were then building houses in Sandy Lane and we were the first family to buy one of those properties in 1936. It was no 3 Sandy Lane and we lived next door to the Warrens. Unlike now when roads are often built before the estate is built, there was no road, just a muddy track. So Knapps put down metal things (used to land aeroplanes) so that we could get to our house. It was a semi-detached house with no electricity, just gas until after the war and we had gas mantels. Around the house was a Market Garden owned by Harvey from Watchfield. My father had 2 pigs and chickens in the garden. I can remember him getting very fond of the pigs and tears were shed when the pig was slaughtered. Possibly forgotten once the delicious meat was tasted. In the late 1960s Biggs Wall a contracting firm put the village on the main sewers. I can remember the trenches and the upheaval this caused.

My early days in the village school were fine and I was there until 1944. The Headmaster was a very strict man but I liked him. He had served as a Captain in the Great War and believed in good discipline. He used to cane the boys regularly but he did not hit the girls. He used to drill us like soldiers and get us marching round the playground for exercise. In addition he would get us exercising in the classroom to keep us warm on a very cold day. In the large classroom which could be divided into 2 classrooms there was a coke stove and the teacher stood in front of it and prevented the heat from reaching the children. When I was in the Infants Mr Dance listened to me singing in Assembly. I had a good voice but was hampered by shyness or modesty so I rarely sang in public. However, after Mr Dance had spoken to my parents about my singing voice this led to me singing in front of the whole school and later I joined in Carols with the other children and we sang from the balcony in the Memorial Hall. The children at Shrivenham Primary School knitted socks and balaclavas for the Forces. In the educational system there was the Infants 5 – 7, Standard One for the Juniors 7 – 9, Standard Two for the 9 – 11 and Standard Three, for those aged 11 – 14. There was a shortage of paper and a new book was a treat. Several of my friends did a paper round before school. Mr Ilott the newspaper seller

lived next door to us and he used to sort the papers in his home. Later he had the Papershop in the High Street (now the One StopShop). My mother would not hear of me delivering newspapers no matter how much I pleaded. However, I was certainly both literate and numerate when I left Shrivenham at 14 to enter the world of work.

The girls went to Bourton for cookery lessons. At first we went in a horse and cart but later travelled by coach. There was not much cooking due to the lack of ingredients with the rationing during the war so it was mostly washing tea towels. Not very exciting so when the opportunity arose we went for a walk on the pretence of going on an errand and made sure it was a leisurely one. All the cooking was done on a smelly paraffin stove.

During the war the Headmaster's wife used to organise parties for the schoolchildren. This was done with the help of the American Army and the parties were held at the College. We were served food on a tray with a partition which contained cake and candy. This was a great treat as it was normally rationed. American soldiers were everywhere in the village and we often saw them sitting outside the pubs.

When I was at school it was before the National Health Service came into being and I well remember going to the Memorial Hall for a tooth extraction by the visiting school dentist. He gave me gas and air in the large kitchen in the Hall before taking my tooth out. Nurse Donnicks lived with her sister in one of the thatched cottages near the Pharmacy. She was the District Nurse who helped bring my younger sister into the world. The Nurse and I shared a birthday and she would take me on her bike to the copse on the Ashbury Road on our birthdays to eat sandwiches. I was not terribly impressed as a small child with this celebration of my birthday, a cake would have been much more interesting.

After leaving school at 14 and starting work, I was allowed to go to the Dances held at the Memorial Hall with Fred Woodward's Band on a Saturday evening, but only if my elder sister would take me. Joan Dance would get up on stage and sing. In the College the Americans had a cinema but I do not remember any of the films I saw. I do remember seeing the German prisoners of war being marched through the village with a big circle on the back of their fatigues to deter them from escaping. They were imprisoned in the College and eventually allowed out on good behaviour. Heinrich and another German decorated my mother's living room in our house in Sandy Lane. They arrived on a rattly old bike. The Italian POWs went down Stainswick Lane singing opera as they went to work on Shepherd's farm.

I married Peter Turner in 1951 in St Andrew's Church, Shrivenham and the Memorial Hall was the venue for our reception. It was austerity time in post war Britain and I remember feeling very thrilled with the lovely food provided for the occasion.

I recall the shops I knew many years ago:

Fords which is now the One Stop Shop had on one side sweets and cigarettes and on the other side it was a draper's store. Later it became Ilott's

Dike's store is now the Treatment Rooms. In that thatched shop there was not anything you could not buy and at Christmas it was like an Aladdin's cave. There

was Miss Dike, Winnie Dike and her brother Billy Dike. Their father was the village undertaker and carpenter and based in where the new vicarage stands today. No motorised hearse but the body was put on a wheeled bier and the cart was pulled along by hand.

Benfords stands on the corner of Church Walk and there was always a lovely smell of bread and cakes. Next to it was a hardware shop which is now the Chinese Chippy.

Opposite was Harris the butcher. It later became the Boffin in the 1970s, a tea room, and is now in private ownership.

The Gulshan Indian restaurant today used to be a fish and chip shop run by the Gages. Previously the premises had been used by a blacksmith. During the war the blacksmith made up bicycles and sold them to the Americans.

Hammonds shop, adjacent to the Crown was a store that sold odds and ends, sometimes sweets. He kept chickens down Stainswick Lane and sold eggs in the shop.

As I look back over my life I know that I have had a happy life. I was born into a caring family and have lived in a lovely village. I was lucky to meet Peter, my husband, when I was 20 and had a very happy and long marriage of 63 years.pP