

Poems



from the Vale

2nd. Edition

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## FOREWORD

Stretching from Faringdon to Wallingford, and from the crest of the Berkshire Downs to the Thames, the Wantage parliamentary constituency embraces about the whole of the Vale of the White Horse. What a privilege it is for me to represent such a beautiful and historic area in the "Mother of Parliaments"!

Age beyond age on British Land  
Aeons and Aeons gone,  
Was peace and war in western hills  
And the White Horse looked on.

For the White Horse knew England  
When there was none to know;  
He saw the first oar break or bend,  
O God, how long ago.

G.K. Chesterton - The Ballad of the White Horse

When I heard about this splendid project of a competition for poems about the Vale I was delighted. There is a practical object, in the shape of fund-raising for the new Watchfield Village Hall. But even more important, there is the higher purpose of helping us all, and especially our schoolchildren, to see our homeland with the new eyes that poetry gives us.

Margherita  
Robin Jackson  
Watch Hill

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*Robert Jackson*

OUR GRATEFUL THANKS TO!

**MRS AGNES BAILEY**  
for the original idea and sponsorship.

**MRS EVELYN STOODLEY**  
for Judging the competition.

**MR L. JUDD**  
for the Cover Design

**MR V. DAY**  
for sponsorship

**DREWEATTS**  
Chartered Surveyors of Wantage  
for technical help with the book.

**MR ROBERT JACKSON M.P.**  
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And - all contributors, without whom the book  
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*Marguerite Fowler.*

*Ruth Horner.*

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Margaret Forster

Jul 78

THE VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE

### THE WHITE HORSE

He stands all alone, majestic and white,  
Upon the hill where I fly my kite.

He's been up there for years and he's made of chalk;  
What a tale he could tell, if he could talk!

BY JOANNE HURST

AGED 10

### WHITE HORSE HILL

Night time at last!  
He changes so fast  
Into a white silver horse

He gallops down the valley,  
Then he stands so still,  
Watching the vale below the hill

Then he goes back to his place,  
He changes again,  
And he stays still for another day.

BY SAMANTHA READ

AGED 10

THE REV. CANNON. J.M. WADE.

## THE VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE

Surrounded by beauty of Cotswolds and Downs  
Not far from gowned cities and stone walls and farms  
Lies a portion of England as fair as can be,  
The Vale of the White Horse you surely must see.

You can walk o'er the hills or ride in the Vale,  
You can shop, find interest, and hear many a tale,  
In towns, villages and taverns as friendly can be  
Oh the Vale of White Horse is the one place for me.

There are not many places where you can stand and survey.  
From beautiful hills - timeless in a day,  
A richness of beauty as gentle can be,  
Oh! beautiful Vale - if others could you, but see  
Churches and chapels, universities and schools,  
Mingle together with craftsmen skilled with their tools;  
An infinite variety of folk as proud as can be  
To live in our Vale and who wouldn't be?

You can travel afar by rail, air or car,  
No fairer place will you find at hand or afar  
Than where Wiltshire and Oxon and Berkshire meet,  
It's a beautiful Vale at the soles of your feet.

Intercity, high speed trains - wind their way through  
Like speeded up caterpillars; you can see in the view  
Too fast one would think for travellers to see  
The beauties of this vale - we know love and see.

From White Horse, Dragon Hill to Old Father Thames,  
Nestles acres of beauty within ancient hems.  
Where else could you find such a gem of great charm,  
Than under the White Horse's eye - protecting from harm?

You can have all your mountains, your coasts and your towns,  
But beauty knows no limit t'ween Cotswolds and downs  
Thank the Lord for his care and skill of his hand,  
In planting the Vale - our part of this land.

THE REV. CANNON. J.M. WADE.

## THE VILLAGE IN WINTER

Yesterday the village was a pale water-colour,  
The snow came in the night;  
Now it is an etching,  
Black and white.

Over the silence of snow-muffled footsteps  
Voices are strangely clear,  
People are telling each other  
"The Winter's here"

Soon come the children, laughing and tumbling,  
In anoracs red, blue, green;  
Their shrill cries are excited,  
Their faces keen.

Baubles bright, in the village shop-window  
Gleam on a tinsel star,  
And a poster - coloured notice,  
Christmas Bazaar.

And the Hall is splendid, with lanterns and streamers,  
Welcoming, gay,  
Warmth to lighten the chill  
Of a winter's day.

MARGUERITE FOWLER

MERVYN PENNY

**THE VALE**

I've wandered far away to see the sights,  
I've witnessed Irish shores and lakeland heights;  
I've seen the mist like cotton wood below,  
Above - the mountain capped with silent snow.

New scenes and places fill a restless zeal,  
But when the wanderings done, then I can feel  
A deeper sense of love for nearer scenes,  
A simpler setting for my dormant dreams.

The Ridgeway's spacious windings endlessly  
Over the hill, this conjures up for me,  
A shepherd in his smock, the Drover's herd,  
The goosegirl's song; these never met again.

Beside the 'Cole' with Common Wood along,  
The Fresden peacocks cry their mournful song.  
As if to say, "Stay back and don't come nigh,"  
For fear you may disturb old bones that lie.

The Odstone Clump, a favourite summer seat,  
Where cool the breezes 'spite the hayfield heat,'  
From where, when mists the valley wreathes about  
At early morn - tops of tall trees sprout.

The Folly standing clear above the town,  
With craggy pines, on Faringdon looks down,  
These I can see, and looking leftward, will  
Be able just to spot Liddington Hill.

'A person of the Vale', I'll take that name;  
Not of these parts, a later convert came,  
But zealous more perhaps than some born nigh,  
You travel on, my ashes here can lie.

**MERVYN PENNY**

**MY ROAD**

My road is a road,  
A road in Watchfield,  
It is near and far,  
It is a two-way traffic-way now  
But I don't care!  
I like it.

**NAOMI WILTON**

**AGED 6 YEARS**

**Watchfield Village Hall**

The new Village Hall  
Is very, very tall!  
It is so good,  
I think  
It is better than wood,  
I think it is the best in the Vale;  
It makes me quite pale!

by **Timothy Holman**

**Aged 6 years**

### UFFINGTON LANDMARK

It stands through winters hail and snow,  
Surveying all who come and go,  
It looks so young and virgin-like, in  
its snow-white coat untouched by earth.  
It cannot run nor canter along,  
It just stands proud beneath the sun,  
If only it could tell a tale,  
There would be no need for fiction in our vale,  
As from it's great clear eye could see  
All the history of years gone by  
I am, of course -  
Referring to -  
Our lovely white horse  
On Uffington Hill.

ADRIAN BAILEY  
AGED 12 YEARS

MERVYN PENNY

### OF DAYS LONG GONE

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, (rainwaters good for your hair)  
Of paraffin lamps, and candle to bed;  
Of frost patterns inside windows on mornings 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

### THE BLOWING-STONE

Have you seen the Blowing-Stone?  
Have you heard it's trumpet-call?  
Once, that resonant tone  
Across the valley blown,  
Could reach the ears of all.

What did the message say?

It was a call to arms;  
And near and far away,  
Where Alfred's crown held sway,  
Men heeded the alarms.

You can try the Blowing-Stone  
That once meant war and death,  
And drowsy bees will drone;  
But to get a ringing tone  
You'll need a lot of breath!

The Danes come still, or so they say,  
But not for war, for holiday.

MARGUERITE FOWLER

### THE BIRTH OF A VILLAGE

#### The Village Now

Long, long ago,  
There was no village dwelling here;  
No fields or pastures, no every lane,  
No church or inn, no picturesque hay-wains,  
The thatch is gone, the tiles are here,  
Insurance is so very dear.  
The Elms long gone, their splendour lost,  
The wood on bonfires in piles tossed.  
The horse no long pulls a cart,  
More often ridden by lady smart.  
The summers shorter, the winters less cold,  
Tales by lamplight no longer told.  
The wind of change, a breeze no more,  
More like a gale blowing all before,  
The boundaries changed, we are Oxon now,  
The Royal accolade gone, it's quite a blow!  
The coffee mornings bring an article made  
(The one last week, it never paid)  
The "Sloan Rangers" outside the village shop,  
The village bank to which they "pop".  
The smith is dead, the forge is cold,  
(The place is a chip-shop now, I'm told!)  
The play-school in the Village Hall,  
The children have a real ball!  
The new estates, with houses grand,  
The lord of the Manor never planned,  
The mortgage is a real worry,  
The Husband will not repay in a hurry!  
The characters gone, they were so kind,  
The like of them we'll never find,  
The pseudo country man's the fashion now  
(The hand that never touched a plough)  
The story's told-I've been a bore,  
The evenings cold - I'll close the door.

Vic Day

MARGUERITE FOWLER



### SPRING IN THE VALE

Spring is when the birds all sing;  
The bees start using their little sting;  
The flowers then all start to bloom,  
That's what I think of Spring,

Spring is when the young trees grow,  
It'll be a while before the snow;  
But let us enjoy it while we can,  
In their backyards people get a tan,  
That's what I think of Spring,

Summer has come,  
And with it lots of sun,  
Gone has the Spring;  
New chicks have started to sing,  
That's what I think of Spring.

by Catherine Fitzgerald

Aged 11

### THE BIRTH OF A VILLAGE

Long, long ago,  
There was no English village nestling here;  
No fields or cottages, or flowery lanes,  
No church or Inn, no picturesque hay-wains,  
Nor anything of happy human cheer;  
Long, long ago.

Up on the high hills,  
There was a way of life for hardy folk,  
Bleak though it was, often the winds blew keen.  
Living was hard, the people strong and lean,  
Surviving summer heat and winter soak,  
Up on the high hills.

There came a time,  
The watery swamp that covered lower ground  
Departed, and it left a valley fair,  
Where men could live in warmer, gentle air,  
Where crops might flourish, husbandry abound;  
Down came the folk to live.

And here, one day  
There came a farming man, Waece his name  
To claim a piece of land, and this he held,  
So he and others called it "Waecefesfeld"  
And down the years it stayed, almost the same.  
His name remained.

On rolled the centuries,  
Saxon and Norman and Plantaganet,  
Tudor and Stuart, Hanoverian Kings;  
The village lived its life round other things,  
Of how the daily problems could be met,  
Birth, Death and Harvest.

Now, after so long,  
The hills still keep their posts as weather-shield,  
And people come and go (some choose to stay)  
And carry on, in Twentyeth Century way.  
The village name has now become Watchfield.  
Remember it, Stranger, remember it.

MARGUERITE FOWLER

### THE BY-PASS

Thundering giants  
Racing the roads with smelly fumes;  
Oil puddles lying on the concrete snake  
Four wheeled animals growling on the hot tar;  
Polution spreading violently, over fields of corn,  
That were once haunts of creatures, long gone.

ANDREW HYDE  
AGED 11

### THE SHRIVENHAM BY-PASS

A great long, winding snake,  
twisting, turning through the countryside.

Lorries thunder by,  
beaten to the turning by whizzing cars.

Dirty, smelly, noisy traffic  
changing the sweet-smelling air  
into spluttering, choking clouds of smoke.

I hate the By-pass,  
the way it stands out,  
surrounded by fields and hedgerows.

ANNA VINCENT  
AGED 11

### WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY

I saved all my coupons,  
And went into Swindon to buy the material.

Mum helped me make a dress,  
The dance was on Friday at the Memorial Hall.

New American faces in the crowd,  
I danced with the village boys.

They knew my Jack was away at war.

"My name's Joe, would you care to dance",  
I said "yes".

He held me in a way I missed.

"Can I walk you home mam?"  
"That's very kind,  
My name's Peggy".

Two days later the telegram arrived;

Jack would never see my new dress.

I was the only woman wearing stockings at his funeral!

NICK DAY

## **WHITE ELEPHANT, SHRIVENHAM**

Our village boasts a splendid hall,  
Stone tiled with massive beams,  
Built as a fit memorial  
To those who died for dreams.

Viscountess Barrington it was  
Whose "drive" secured our prize,  
Cajoling friends - County and Stage,  
To build before our eyes -

- A village hall with all 'mod cons',  
A place for all to use  
For dances, soirees, meetings too,  
For sporting and the muse.

But time moves on, and times have changed,  
And distances grow short,  
We go elsewhere or watch the box,  
The Hall's a second thought.

So here we have a splendid hall  
That's lost its former role,  
To Messes and to Civvy Club  
Our Hall has lost its "soul"!  
Where the Hunt Ball of former times,  
The weekly "hops", the "flicks"?  
Our hall has sadly now become  
A pile of costly bricks!  
Our neighbours, Watchfield, have no doubt  
That rebuilding their hall  
Is what they, rightly need to do,  
Before the "old" can fall.

So, buck up Shrivenham, use your loaf  
(Your'e paying through the rates)  
Let's see more use, more concerts plays,  
Or they could close the gates!

**MERVYN PENNY**

## **BY-PASS**

Blundering, thundering juggernauts race by;  
Great big smoky clouds fill up your eyes,  
Motor bikes whizz by, like bees in a swarm;  
Great big clouds of smoke build up into a storm,  
The long industrial road seems to last forever,  
Cutting through the countryside like a strap of leather,  
Smelly fumes roam around in the air,  
Not a driver will ever care.

**JONATHAN FOLLAND**

**AGED 11 YEARS**

## **THE BY-PASS**

The bendy roads  
And traffic loads,  
Whizzing past so fast.  
The dusty bends  
Will never end.

**WAYNE WALSH**

**AGED 10 YEARS**

## THE VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE

For centuries swept swirling ock  
Where faithful shepherd folds his flock,  
Where Uffington's then faceless clock,  
Resounds from eight-side tower -

The hallowed home of Thomas Hughes  
Throckmorton's record "Long-tailed Blue's"  
The great "Old Berkshire's" view-halloos,  
And Stanford's sage-cheese hares.

From Folly Hill the horse looms clear  
Where Icknield and the Ridgeway veer  
Past home of bacon, milk and beer,  
Of horse-race, feasts and fairs,

Of fine, great barns where tithes were stored,  
Loyd-Lindsay, Philanthropic Lord,  
Of grinning-matches and backword,  
And becote by the bower

Forgotten hamlets foot the Downs -  
Starved "foggers" fill fast-swelling towns.  
Hayden this backwater renowns,  
Though trod by trade and trains.

Alas, no more steam-engines chuff  
To Wantage, Faringdon and Uffington -  
Though By-passes enough shall suffocate green plains!

Through rolling Berkshire's sleepy vale  
Suburbia's cruel tides assail,  
No sense or reason more prevail  
Till but the horse remains.

Whilst Berks. and Oxon. fierce debate  
The virtue of a vile estate  
Of Reading residences, fate  
Condemns deserted farm.

Where Alfred blew his signal shrill,  
Where stallions steam down Hackpen Hill,  
Now radiation dustmen drill  
Away our country calm.

Proud "Wilts. and Berks." our needs did tow  
Till Brunel - and then Beeching's blow.  
No lead-enriched A420  
Feeds cows for Europe's "lakes".

From Sparsholt's "spire" transmissions shower,  
While Didcot, smug with "Nation's power",  
Sends thick, black billows high to glower  
And watch where wayland wakes.

Though wealth of bards this vale has boasted,  
Pusey's horn "improves" teased  
More than he or Tull,  
who most did Fame it - dame Pam Ayres!

And thus, as tribute poor, I rhyme  
Of garden vale, with cities' grime  
Now sour. Who Iron-Age hill-forts climb  
But tourists? - None else cares

The dragon - sooth to say - was slain,  
But bold St. George comes ne'er again.  
See how, when horse to acid rain  
Succumbs, this vale then fares!

SOPHIA SMITH

## THE PUNT

When we were boys, we stole a punt,  
The sort men use the duck to hunt,  
For many years we'd had a raft,  
Becoming skilled in that old craft.

We had often sailed from Tuckmill,  
Towards the mill below the hill,  
Kingfishers fled, the moorhens scattered,  
As through the reeds our way we battered.

With vigorous pushing on the pole,  
We struggled on, down to the cole,  
Pirates bold on broader seas,  
We made our way with practiced ease.  
Now this "make do" we could end,  
The prayers answer God did send,  
The real boat so strong, so splendid,  
Our mighty labour now he ended!

We would not leave it in the brook,  
In case by rival gang t'was took,  
So with heaving, groan and grunt,  
From muddy steam we dragged the punt.

Then up the hill, over sarsen laid,  
Our sweating way to Shrivenham made,  
Through cornfield yellow, with poppies spread,  
Would the task be complete by time for bed?  
The path was long - about a mile,  
Through hunting gate and over stile,  
We dragged it on, crushing summer flowers,  
It must have taken a couple of hours.

The chosen pond at last we reached,  
The punt upon the bank was beached,  
Now came the launch, down through the mire,  
How I wished that my "wellies" were higher!

The punt went in, and so did we,  
To our young minds it was the sea,  
Our joy complete, the youthful sharing  
We did not notice farmer staring

With Bill about to walk the plank,  
His angry words would end our prank;  
He sent us off home, then took the boat  
Back to the farm upon his float.

Our brief summer venture thus did end,  
That treasured punt we'd never mend;  
With auger sharp t'was filled with holes,  
It broke our hearts - destroyed our souls!

I only hope that man long dead,  
Rests easy in his last bed.  
He must have found some wicked pleasure,  
When he - rival pirate - stole our treasure!

## VIC DAY

### THE VALE

Standing on a bridge,  
When the moon is out,  
It's so quiet  
That you can hear  
The ripples of the water near your ear,  
An owl hooting, in the distance or near.

### REBECCA EYRE

#### AGED 11 YEARS

### SHRIVENHAM

Shrivenham is a nice place,  
Not noisy at all!  
Lots of shops Shrivenham has.  
I like the "REC"  
You can play lots of games there,  
And the college, with the river.  
I have lived in Shrivenham all my life,  
I have liked it all the time.

### ARMEN TOPALIAN

#### AGED 8 YEARS

### DEJA VU

I am a child,  
The harsh wind bites on Bronte Moors.  
Warm and safe, I'm reading indoors.  
Theres "Puck of Pooks Hill's" Wayland Smith  
Is he real or is he a myth?

I am a school child.  
At school in the County of York,  
I hear of ancient horse in chalk,  
And of Alfred, whose deeds were great,  
Oh, may I see his Southern State!

I am adolescent  
Poets inspire me by the Ouse -  
the cruel starkness of Ted Hughes  
On mellow lines penned by John B.  
From Uffington - where can that be?

I am grown  
Rossetti stayed with local Lords,  
Unknown Dante to Northern hordes  
Our church window is by Burne-Jones  
Strange artistry for Norman stones.

I am here  
From my window, I see the ancient steed  
eternally leaping  
when beside him, his quizzical eye  
ignores my joyous weeping.

High on the ridgeway, Wayland Smith  
hammers under wind-battered trees,  
His timeless taps are lost for ever  
over the Vales verdant leas.

I went to Wantage and saw Alfred  
at sea in the swirling square,  
Our Father of the Navy saw no ships  
- he did not seem to care.

The speed train ignored Shrivenham Station,  
Took Tom Brown to school  
Sir John, if you were here,  
Your witty verse would call red-tape a fool.

At Kelmcott, Morris's pre-Raphaelite Ghosts  
flit through ageing halls  
Rossettis' genius gift of pen and paint  
proudly clothes the walls.

I file with crowds round Buscot House  
to see Burne-Jones "Briar Rose"  
Mocked by modern critics, I now know him  
and side against his foes.

In these Northern distant days,  
the South Magnetically beckoned  
Foolish child - my mind did not contemplate  
plain folk for a second

Villagers scurry like busy ants,  
vibrant with fulfilling life,  
See the farmers sowing, reaping,  
the skilful thatcher with his knife.

Ephemeral threads of truth and imagination  
are so frail,

The dead live on while the living weave  
Legends for the future Vale.

**ROSEMARY MALINS -SMITH**

## **FORTY YEARS ON**

My parents arrived with the R.M.C. of S,  
And I hated it here, I have to confess,  
There were military men,  
and their sons and daughters,  
And we lived in houses,  
or should I say, quarters!

There was tennis, soccer and golf,  
Plus the occasional Ball,  
Held in a "Mess" or sometimes a "Hall"  
Families arrived with types of faces,  
"Aussies" and Asians, from faraway places.  
I soon settled down to the different life,  
Far from the hustle and bustle,  
and even the strife;  
I forgot the city, with all of it's noise,  
I discovered the country,  
and all of its joys.

We had a "Pop" Festival here,  
when people came flocking,  
But nothing terrible happened  
at least not too shocking.  
And lately we've had a Shrivenham By-pass  
Like a circular road,  
only a little more high-class,  
We've also been stationed in Wilts,  
Oxon, or Berks,  
Our letters are stamped  
with varying post marks.

Well, I could carry on being ever so vocal,  
But all that I ask is, they call me a "Local"

**MAUREEN COYLE**

## WHAT IS THE VALE?

What is the Vale?

A mass of villages and towns,  
All linked together,  
With friendliness between the communities.

What is the Vale?

A district which has beauty and charm,  
Where each week there is movement and activities.

What is the Vale?

A place where the old people tell you tales,  
Of when they were young, and share their memories.

What is the Vale?

A place which welcomes you, when you come  
Where everybody knows each other  
and are always pleased to help.

What is the Vale?

Somewhere, where there are open fields,  
Woodland and wild life,  
A place where you can pick berries and flowers.

What is the Vale?

A WONDERFUL place,  
With an interesting history,  
Come and find out for yourself.

**NICOLA HOLMAN**

**AGED 12 YEARS**

## LIVING IN "THE VALE"

I never have yearned for luxury things,  
Or to live on palatial shore;  
A place there is where my spirit clings  
That's kind, when the heart is sore.

Where the woodlands dream,  
By an ancient stream,  
In an air of mystery;  
And the roads run still  
Round the White Horse Hill,  
With a half-known history.

And I love the folk  
Who will stop and joke,  
And lean on a spade or hoe,  
And grow runner-beans,  
And potatoes and greens,  
And smile, when I say "Hello".

I never did yearn for luxury things,  
Or to live in expensive way,  
A place there is where my spirit clings,  
Where the kindly ones may stay.

**MARGUERITE FOWLER**



### THE DOWNS

I've walked these hills for many years,  
They've shared my hopes, my joy, my fears;  
On grass-soft banks I've laid to ponder  
What lies beyond the blue haze yonder.

I've dreamt of days long since passed,  
Of Stone Age Man, his tombs deep grassed  
The Romans bold once trod this way,  
With banners bright they came to stay.

Then Vikings fierce, with yellow hair,  
And helmets horned, so proud did wear;  
Then Alfred came, his Saxons bold  
Were soon to break the Norseman's hold.

The Roundheads and the Royalists came,  
The Downs were never quite the same,  
These green grass knolls saw many hanging,  
They heard gibbet chains gristly clanging.

Peace then reigned for many a year,  
Till Hitler's war so filled with fear,  
The Downs were used as ranges then,  
Till the bells were heard in the vale again.

The sheep came by their bell a'ringing  
Gentle shepherd-lads, more oft times singing  
Passing by this way to country fairs,  
Disturbing rabbits, skylarks and hares.  
On still, warm days I come to lie,  
Beneath the deep blue vaulted sky,  
Peace no longer so easy found,  
Transistor noise is all around!

Would all those who have passed this way  
Ever know these Downs as they are today?

I doubt if Roman, Dane or Angle  
Would much approve this modern tangle!  
Maybe one day, when we've passed by,  
There will be just earth, grass and sky,  
No more brash 'punks', with hair in spikes  
Will break God's peace on motor bikes.

### VIC DAY

### THE VALE

Looking around the Vale,  
I see to my delight,  
Different kinds of animals,  
And birds half-way in flight.  
The Vale is a wonderful place to be,  
There's such a lot to do and see;  
If you have a choice of what to do,  
I'd live in the Vale if I were you.

BY NICOLA HOLMAN

AGED 11

## DRAGON HILL

The hill where no grass grows;  
The hill where a fierce battle once was fought  
Of a knight and a terrible worm  
Blood pouring, fire scorching  
Charging dragon, terror reigning far and wide  
Roaring, scaly armour gleaming, teeth clashing

Brave lion hearted knight,  
fighting the fire breathing dragon  
Suit of armour and red cross upon his chest  
A christian knight, so gallant a knight is he  
Sword gleaming in the light,  
to kill the worm is his job  
He thrusts his sword into a bare patch  
under the worm  
Screeching, fire failing,  
the worm dies his blood pouring

All that excitement now is over  
A lonely hill once  
more looking toward that brilliant majestic horse  
Nothing grows where the blood did flow  
A hill, chalky hill now  
Until excitement reigns again;  
Until then the hill peacefully sleeps.  
by Emily Edwards

Aged 9

## 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, blossom 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?

EILEEN JESSEY

## THE YANKS

It must have been in forty-four  
The yanks came over to go to war,  
To village girls they looked like Gable,  
To girls they said "you're like Betty Grable!"

With accents thick, and wallets matching,  
They soon had village heads a'scratching,  
Some came from "Frisco" or New York;  
The kosher ones would not eat pork!

The local whore, whose name was Lucy,  
With thick red lips, so very juicy,  
Rode a bike, she worked in "Vickers";  
We all knew she wore no knickers!  
The yanks soon found this all out,  
A negro put her "up the spout".  
Her baby son was coffee coloured,  
Her poor old mum was very worried.  
Those doughboys were so very randy,  
Showered local kids with packs of candy,  
They filled the pubs, drank all the beer,  
And whats more, pleased the local queer!

Their trucks dark green, thick smoke expelling,  
Yet their presence here was most compelling;  
The local blacksmith hired them bikes,  
He knew the Elmers, Zekes and Ikes.

Fortunes were made, virginities lost,  
Who ever stopped to count the cost!  
The cigars strong, the cookies sweet,  
Empty bottles littered the village street.

The village will never be the same,  
Perhaps it's better that they came!  
They were so generous, loud and kind,  
And many memories they left behind.

The bugle called, they went to war,  
The local folk see them no more,  
They left their homes to come and die,  
Now in some distant land they lie.

Thanks, Yanks!

## VIC DAY

## THE WATCHFIELD POST OFFICE POEM

The Post Master, like most Post Masters  
Has to be very clever,  
But if you can go to the Post Office or not  
Depends on the weather.

If it is rainy, it's such a pain,  
But if you live just down the lane,  
I suppose it's alright.  
If it is sunny we can go and buy some honey  
but we'll need a few coins of money.

The Postman comes in his van with his letters,  
With all sorts of addresses,  
And in different kinds of messes!

EMILY TALBOT

AGED 7 YEARS

## OUR VALE

What makes me want to stay at home,  
And not the far flung Dales to roam?  
Is it the ties of young and old,  
Or, is it happy sounds and well-known roads.

To walk, and feel the winds sent from our Hill,  
Could not, but make one linger still;  
To sample more the joys and scents,  
That bind one to a Vale from Heaven sent.

Our rolling hills are as sages of old,  
They encompass all beauty, and their arms enfold  
All that they love - this heritage of many others,  
This shining valley, this Land of our Fathers.

BY PAM ILOTT

## THE WHITE HORSE HILL

Standing brilliant and majestic,  
On a green and white hill not very far away.  
Lies a brilliantly white horse all made of chalk,  
Not seeing, not hearing, not making any noise  
But that is in daytime he comes alive at night.

Just think of it

A white horse running, jumping down the hill.  
Perhaps a fairy makes him come alive,  
You never know about that horse  
Whatever it may do, but I know something,  
Long ago, you could step on that eye of his  
and your wish will come true,  
That brilliant majestic horse.

PENNY EDWARDS  
AGED 7 YEARS

## BATTLE FOR THE HILL

Fighting, fighting on the hill,  
Raising swords to kill, to kill,  
Capturing peasants and killing knights  
All engulfed in raging fights.

People fighting for the hill,  
The raging battle never stands still,  
People lying on the ground,  
Dead,  
Never making a sound.

JOE TALBOT

AGED 10 YEARS

## THE WHITE HORSE

The white figure on the hill,  
Silhouetted against the great green mass,  
Desolate, lonely all at night,  
Waiting for the dawn to break.

The big white horse,  
Stares down on the Vale;  
He stands patiently  
Waiting for the Beltain hunt.

BY KAREN CLARKE

AGED 11

## THE BOY WITH COMICS TO SWOP

I walked to Watchfield the other day,  
To swop some comics, then stay to play;

The path was dusty, I was tired  
Clutching the cap pistol I'd never fired.

The comics were heavy, I had a few  
Some quite tatty, some quite new

One 'Yank', four English was the rate,  
This was agreed at school, with my mate.

I got to the house, his mum was there,  
It was just round in Oxford Square.

I went inside, was given some cake,  
Then to business, the swop to make.

He tempted me with Batman and Robin,  
Asking me what could I lob in.

Three Dandies, one Beano, were my mark  
I had to hurry, it was getting dark.

Mum had said "Now don't be late"  
"Come back through the fields, the bottom gate".

I left at six, as the evening drew in,  
I stopped at the brook to throw a stone in;

The air was clear, the weather fine,  
As I wandered home through those fields of mine.

I'll go next week with another stack  
I love the fields, so I'll come this way back.

I was just ten, not a care I had,  
The war that raged - not all that bad!

VIC DAY

## THE WHITE HORSE

There it stands, alone on the hill,  
It appears that time has stood still,  
It has not moved for many a year,  
Of man or beast, it has no fear,  
It cannot gallop, trot or walk,  
And it does not hear us talk

BRADLEY FERGUSON

AGED 9

## THE BIG WHITE HORSE

There is a white horse  
Who lies on a hill;  
It is made of chalk,  
So it lies patiently still.

This lovely beast  
With its gleaming white back,  
Stands bravely  
While awaiting attack.

If this figure could talk,  
It would tell us its tale,  
Of how it survives  
Through wind, rain and hail.

by Melanie Catterall

Aged 11

### THE WHITE HORSE HILL

So high and mighty,  
It stands out like a majestic finger,  
Overtowering the rest of the Vale.

The horse carved from chalk,  
Scarred forever for the whole world to see,  
Scars that will never be removed.

The fort has been destroyed,  
Ruined by many battles,  
Remains left, as a reminder.

A monument as timeless as the earth,  
A creation which will last  
Until the world's end.

**CHRISTOPHER BLACKMAN**

**AGED 11 YEARS**

### CRICKET AT R.M.C.S.

When Cricket Season cometh round,  
Much talk goes on about that Ground,  
Where well known team meets well-known team,  
And makes it all so solemn seem.  
People stay in, at home, to see  
The latest matches on T.V.

But I remember Cricket days,  
Nearer to home, in summer-haze,  
With white-beflannelled, long, male legs,  
And pic-nic teas with hard-boiled eggs;  
And wary looks at clouded sky,  
And wondering if the grass was dry,

For they who wielded willow-bat,  
Or umpired, under shady hat,  
Were friends, who loved their summer sport,  
And whether ball was dropped, or caught,  
Or runs were made - or just a Duck,  
Well! That was Life, and that was Luck!

Ah! Saturday and Sunday Play  
With lunches rushed to get away;  
Watching the batsman walk toward  
The wicket, on the far green sward;  
The children saying "Have we won?"  
And "Look, my daddy's made a run!"

So long ago it seems to me,  
With Cricket Week, and Strawberry Tea.  
Then later, dancing at the Club,  
Our little lives around a hub.  
O, flying ball and swinging bat!  
Go bravely on. I'm glad of that.

**M FOWLER**

### THE FIRING RANGE

The mere sight of flying lead  
Is enough to make you fall down dead,  
The loud violent thunder cracks  
Sound like huge snapping, breaking backs;  
The artillery reload their bullets of death  
They boom smoke that comes out like steamy hot breath;  
The bullets whip through the soft, Summer air,  
The flying lead will give you a scare.

PAUL NEW

AGED 11 YEARS

### THE ANIMAL'S DEATH TRAP

The whizzing and banging,  
Clinking and clanging,  
Is the animal's death trap  
Cut through the Vale.

The poor little animals  
go for a walk,  
But they step on the death trap,  
and then give a squawk,

Big machines,  
They flatten the poor things,  
And shatter the peace of the Vale,  
For ever and ever,

MELANIE CATTERALL

AGED 11 YEARS

### THAT FRIEND OF MINE, OLD JACK

There was a man, I knew him well,  
Of his life, the tale I'll tell.  
He was not famous, not well known,  
But he was Berkshire to the bone.

He had known me since I was a boy,  
My dear old mothers' pride and joy,  
He saw me grow and go to school,  
Through summers hot and winters cool.

He taught me how to set a snare,  
For frightened rabbit, wind-swift hare,  
He always knew when it would rain,  
His poor old "screwomatics" gave him pain.

On winter nights we'd travel far  
To poach wild duck, beneath cold star,  
Unlucky home, with boots soaking wet  
We'll get them tomorrow night, I bet!

He loved his baccy and his beer,  
His seat in the local to him most dear,  
He would do no man a wrong,  
But would instead help him along.

He'd lived his life in that same old cott,  
Watched his mother cook with iron pot,  
When asked what he thought was good luck,  
"Oh, to chew the bread for Charlie's duck".

Of gardener's tricks he knew them all,  
His runner beans were ten feet tall!  
A liberal dollop of pigeon's droppings  
Sent his early pea pods popping.

I left our Vale and went to sea,  
He stayed back home to wait for me,  
He'd never travelled far away,  
Only to go racing for a day.

He told me that when a boy  
Money was short, he had no toy;  
He'd often for a sovereign fight  
His mates on many a summer night.

For titled visitor he would scrap  
While they would shout "Go on, old chap"  
With noses bleeding, trousers tattered  
To those rich snobs it little mattered.

They'd had sport, and they had paid  
Now in the dust those urchins laid,  
Then home to mansion they'd return,  
No thought of their bread to earn!

When Jack was married, he had a son,  
He and his wife they had but one,  
The son, two girls and na'r a boy,  
To dear old Jack they were a joy.

The girls soon grew, old Jack often teasing,  
All their whims and fancies pleasing,  
They were the apple of his eye,  
To him with children's troubles cry.

The years rolled on, my friend grew old,  
But still his country yarns he told,  
Of days gone by, and harder times,  
Of village schools, and nursery rhymes.

Swimming naked in Beckett lake,  
For boyish prank, girls clothes to take,  
They'd run arund themselves to dry  
All the time looking out for passer-by.

The Autumn brought the orchard raid,  
To struggle home with apples laid,  
To Jack it all seemed rural bliss,  
to me a boy, too good to miss.

Then Jack took sick, grew pale and thin,  
The doctor said "We'll take him in,"  
The hospital strange, filled him with fear,  
A place like this he'd never been near.

They brought him home to let him lie,  
In his own cottage, then to die,  
I lost a friend, so good so rare,  
It was more than I could bear.

Now that he is dead and gone,  
Hig memory with me lives on.  
No more to his tales can I listen,  
On Winter nights the hoar frost glisten.

His cottage changed, now much altered,  
The new folks there they never faltered,  
A bathroom smart, and central heating,  
All long Winters efforts beating.

They are not the same to me,  
Quite like him they'll never be,  
It was a sad day God called his marker,  
And took to heaven old Jack Barker.

## VIC DAY



When the Shrivenham by-pass was being built,  
two boys discovered artifacts, which led to  
finding an early Saxon Burial Ground on the  
outskirts of Watchfield.

### THE SAXON BURIAL GROUND

How much of England sleeps  
Under the soil? What records of the past  
Lie in the mists of by-gone centuries?

Sometimes the smallest clue  
Shines like a star, piercing a moonless sky  
Pointing the way to new discovery.

On the village edge,  
Under the ground where twentieth century feet  
Trode daily, and our modern motor cars  
Sped on their way, past field and ditch and hedge  
An area stands where past and present meet,  
A place the Saxons knew.

Here, in their graves  
They laid their honoured dead, with treasured goods  
Respectfully, according to their lights  
Guarding the hallowed spot from thieves and knaves,  
And sanctified it with strange Pagan rites.

They could not know,  
That, in a future, many years from then,  
When Time had covered up the sacred plot,  
And later-folk had used the land and gone,  
When ways were changed, and ancient gods forgot,  
These bones would be unearthed by learned men.

Not long ago,  
Working to clear a site, to build a road,  
Two young men stopped, stared at an object rare,  
Down in the earth that the machine had turned,  
And knew that there was something lying there,  
Something that must be salvaged; and were glad  
That they had found what others might have spurned.

And so, again, in Nineteen Eighty-Three,  
The place was guarded, faithfully and well,  
Till archeologists came hurrying there,  
To dig and find, among the earth and stones  
A store of artifacts and scattered bones,  
A story of the living Past to tell.

M FOWLER

### THE WHITE HORSE

Through the day he stands so still,  
With people gazing at his hill.  
When night has come  
He comes to life and down the hill shall come.

Then he walks along looking for his herd of wild horses;  
Soon he finds them hidden among the branches,  
He takes them to a special river,  
There they could drink and eat to their content,  
Soon dawn shall come and  
the horse goes back to his sleeping place,  
There he shall spend another day;  
When people glare and stare at him,  
Some people say through the night they hear his neigh.

by Catherine Fitzgerald

Aged 11

## BOYHOOD DAYS

At Northford Bridge a little stream  
Begins its journey short  
from Beckett Lake to River Cole,  
Sheer joy, much fun had brought,  
to boys and girls and others too,  
Who quiet places sought!  
The boys to fish, the girls to play  
In summers that seemed long,  
the only sounds, the rustling reeds,  
The brook and wild bird song

Twas here that boys with rod and line,  
for most the rod a stick  
no reels, no creels, no landing nets  
no tackle-shop near by  
Just Tom Dikes shop in Shrivenham,  
where those with pence could buy  
a line, a float, and hooks  
With just these three, and full of glee,  
we set out for the 'Crooks'

Through churchyard path, across the slade,  
through stones at Gypsy Lane,  
To Bremhill now a sea of wheat,  
and a path to tread again.  
To the brook and stepping stones  
at Tuckmills Little Bridge.  
Where Watchfield meets with Shrivenham,  
beneath elms, upon a ridge.  
Miss Joyces' cottage, once a mill,  
snuggled with thatched roof low.  
Hard by the brook, walled gardens neat,  
and many flowers did grow.

The Watchfield boys with stones and turves  
had made, down stream a dam  
In the deep pool, and after school,  
the village children swam.  
At other times the boys would fish  
for roach and perch and dace.  
Pike there were to and Kingfishers blue,  
and dragon flies borne on blue lace,  
Lilies Iris and kingcups  
with a myriad wild Flowers grew,  
along the banks and in the stream,  
and others there were too.

'Deep corner' was a favourite spot  
for boys with baited hook,  
A false move here on willow branch,  
or careless step on bank,  
Would see the fisher in the brook  
while all his tackle sank.  
We'd left for fishing just past noon,  
how time did seem to fly!  
Just one more try, then we must go,  
with sun now low in sky,  
'Hang on, Hang on' one lad would cry,  
I think I've got a bite.  
Others muttered 'course HE would -  
come on, ITS nearly night'  
With lines wound round the end of rod,  
complete with cork and hook  
And bottles that had held cold tea,  
we left the Watchfield brook.  
To wind our way back home once more,  
the way that we had come  
The dew now on the meadow,  
the corn now standing still,  
A barn owl, silent as a ghost  
flew low across the hill,  
In single file we cross Bremhill,  
the moon now rising high  
And not far off the church tower  
now is stark against the sky.

Oil lamps flicker, mellow light  
from cottage windows small  
in Clampits Lane,  
Just two more styles,  
a sleeper bridge, and then the churchyard wall,  
Reflecting now, when we'd set out,  
it seemed not very far,  
Our step was light and eager  
a trout would be our prize -  
Returning torn, wet muddied  
with tired and down cast eyes,  
What trophies had we gathered?  
Three minnows in a jar.

Times and people all have changed  
of folk there are now many,  
But who today such pleasure finds,  
for as little as a penny?  
But then 'tis fifty years or more  
some gone and some still hale,  
and some of us remember still  
and often backward look,  
To boyhood in the White Horse Vale,  
and sport at Watchfield brook.

**LES JUDD**

## **THE VALLEY**

The White Horse standing out so bold,  
Against the green pastures,  
Where tractors moan and groan,  
Where sweet smelling flowers,  
Blossom in the sun.  
Where people walk into the valley,  
To hear mother nature sing.  
Where people go to be alone,  
And to be together.  
To see into the future  
And into the past.  
To see where things began in days long ago.

**JUSTIN DICKINSON**

**AGED 14 YEARS**

**WALKING ON THE HILLS**

Here in the vale a strange white horse is seen,  
Where long ago, many in battle died;  
The victors cut their mark on the hill-side  
A chalky mystery amidst the green.

We hear no clash of weapons on the hill,  
But as I walk beneath those lovely skies,  
I wonder if the dust of warriors lies  
Under my feet, and spirits wander still;

And once I heard a story someone told  
Of walking on the hill, lonely and late;  
Something there was (he could not quite relate)  
That touched his being with a sense of cold.

I have no fears there, when the sun is bright,  
But think I would not venture late at night!

**M FOWLER**

**LOCAL**

They stood around the bar,  
The local men;  
They chattered about this and that  
Within their 'ken'.

"We want a chap to represent our local needs;"  
Not one to "talk a donkey's leg"  
But one of deeds!

"He must be a local" said old Bill,  
"Newcomers dursn't know;  
What we do wants a fellow who's  
A real local d'snow."

Another, somewhat quieter sort of bloke  
With longish head -  
"What's wrong with Vic, I'd like to know?  
He's local and well read".

Up shot my mate - he's Shriv'nam bred and born -  
"L-l-local M-man - hes n-not,  
Surely y-you've forgot, I-l-If you thinks b-back, his  
Grandad came from Longcot.

**MERVYN PENNY**