

Bill Hammond Remembers 1928 - 2012

I am one of only 2 people today in Shrivenham who can say that they were born in the house they are still living in. I was born on the 7th May 1928 and No 7 High Street, my home, was formerly No 17 High Street until it was re-numbered. My father William Hammond, worked as a baker for Mr Robert Pound who had a baker and grocer's shop in Shrivenham as well as a similar business in Ashbury. In addition to this, Robert Pound owned 2 mills. When Robert Pound died, the Shrivenham business was bought by a Colonel Ames who brought Mr George Benford to run the grocery shop. Later on George Benford bought the premises from Col Ames and re-named it Benford's Store.

In my parents' day one of our downstairs rooms was used as a shop and my father was well known for his baking - my father had always worked as a baker and lastly in what later became known as Benford's store until he retired in 1935. From then on he concentrated on his poultry farm in the Ashbury Road. My parents sold bread, groceries and fruit and vegetables. My mother then took care of the shop that became busier and busier after War broke out necessitating my father's presence back in the shop.

The house itself was built in 1866 by the Butlers who lived in Bourton in the family home that is now Pinewood School. Just as an aside, this family home was where the grandparents of the politician R A Butler who almost became Prime Minister lived. The young RAB regularly came back to Bourton in his school holidays to stay with his grandparents, Sir Kendall and Lady Butler, as his parents were abroad on Colonial service. The young RAB was always spoken of as being a very polite boy. Initially our house was first of all rented out to a harness maker, Mr Woodbridge, for 30 years and subsequently rented out to a baker who installed an oven at the back of the house. My father bought No 7 High street in 1923. Sadly, by then the oven was worn out and useless.

My very earliest memory is when I watched Mr H G Knapp and his sister building a hayrick at the back of their thatched barn. My next memory of the incident was me on the rick with them and my mother, Jane Hammond, shouting from the garden wall "What are you doing over there". I must have been about 3 at the time. A later incident that stands out in my memory was when I was at school, I was about 7, was when someone in the class mentioned Acorn Bridge but pronounced it "Akern Bridge" which was how we all pronounced it then. The teacher took the child to task saying that was broad Berkshire talk and the proper way was "Acorn". When I told my father he grunted and said "you and your teacher". Several years later I took a quiet delight in finding that the teacher was wrong. An old map was put up in the hardware shop showing clearly "Akern Way" going from Pennyhooks lane to the Highworth Road and then entering Sandhills farmland and away to the Swindon Road. Part of this track has been ploughed out now.

Still later I remember Mr Dance the teacher telling us that the name of Shrivenham meant that it was a place for the shriving of sins. However, he could not find any supporting evidence.

Shrivenham has changed so much in the last 50 years. When I was young I knew the names of everybody who lived on both sides of the High Street and also where they worked. Today I know very few indeed and I'm not sure I can tell you very much about Shrivenham's history. As a young man most of my days were spent away from the village and I just used to sleep here. I was always up at 5 o'clock in the morning as I worked for G. Cameron's Dairy and went round delivering the milk. At that time G. Cameron operated from Faringdon. Later, Eddie, the eldest son, made a depot in Claypits Lane. I rarely saw many Shrivenham people.

As a boy I made mention to my father of the old cottages which are in the High Street and face Stainswick Lane. He retorted that they might look old but the originals had been demolished and then re-built so that they looked exactly the same as before in the late 1890's.

I remember the old railway carriage that stood outside "Knapps Dairy". This is at the top end of where Catherine Close is today and is named after Catherine Knapp. Originally the land belonged to Fred Knapp, father of Harold Knapp the builder. The story goes that he deliberately spelt it that way. Fred Knapp, interestingly enough, when he came to the village was a retired Metropolitan Police Sergeant. The Knapp family in Shrivenham who can trace their origins back to the 17th century are distantly related to the large Knapp family in Stanford-in-the-Vale. Joseph Knapp, brother to Fred, was a builder. His sons, Harry and Len, took over his business in the 1930's and built many of the post-war houses in the village.

Reg Knapp, who owned the Garage in the High Street belonged to an entirely different branch of the Knapp family. To return to the railway carriage, it was an old-fashioned coach and was dark blue in colour. It was used as a workshop and fitting room by the military tailors. It arrived there in the late 1930's as part of the preparations for the War that was clearly visible on the horizon. In all there were about 16 military tailors in the area. They were not all in railway carriages and I remember a sitting room of one of the cottages in the High street being used for a similar purpose. There was another military tailor's operating from a shed-like building in my neighbour's garden at No 5. This "shed" was stone built had a thatched roof and was attached to the house. Today, No 5 is now one house but was originally 3 cottages. There are pictures of the "Knapps Dairy" carriage in the History of Faringdon. Recent information indicates that the carriage built in 1885 which originally went to the Syon Museum in London for restoration, is now in Festiniog, Wales, being further restored and hoping to be used next year, 2012, for nostalgia runs.

A dramatic memory I have of war time Shrivenham was when, in 1940, I actually heard and saw a German bomber flying very low. I was a lad of 12 at the time but old enough to recognise the sound of an enemy aircraft. It is odd how little incidents stick in your mind for at the time my father and I were in the garden – my father was up a plum tree picking the ripe plums. I shouted that it was flying behind the Church. It dropped its bombs in the Highworth road adjacent to some fields where the men were working at Harvest Cart. The bomber aimed 4 bombs at them, followed by 3 bursts of machine gunfire. Fortunately they missed their target and the men were unhurt. Two of the bombs exploded on impact and the other 2 had to be de-fused.

Soon after this incident a Wellington bomber came down on a pig farm that bordered Stallpits farm and Damson Trees. It was an incredible sight for the bomber was firmly wedged with each of its wings stuck in a tree. It looked almost as if the wings had been used as a chainsaw. It did not explode or catch fire and no member of the crew was hurt as far as I remember. I can't see a modern plane coming off so lucky.

Again in 1940, as a boy I can remember the many BEF soldiers who had been brought to Shrivenham for dispersal. There were so many of them sitting along the High Street in large groups. These were some of the men who had come back from Dunkirk.

I remember the first sewerage scheme when it was put in the village and also the arrival of gas, electricity and telephones. I can also remember Fred Tucker the blacksmith and Roy Day who delivered milk from his own cows. The Bank first came to our house before the War. They put in another front door to the property and used one of our downstairs rooms to transact their business. This is why we have 2 entrance doors at the front of the house. The Bank was open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. The first Banksman was a Mr Moore who happened to be in the TA. And thus when the War started he was gone and the Bank soon closed until after the War. They returned a few years later before building their branch in 1963 where they are today.

The wall running along Horne's corner was not always the rounded shape you see today. It used to have a sharp right-angled bend and you could only see half of the windows in the first cottage as you approached the bend. It was altered to improve visibility. Shrivenham used to have 3 bends in the road; all have been straightened out now. At the top end of the village as you leave for Swindon a field was cut through to make it straight and a lovely little house was demolished. The Brickell brothers, Bob and George, erected a garage at the side of the new road. In turn they were succeeded by the Tyre brothers and then the Kettle brothers. In more recent years this garage has given way to the houses at The Green.

Shrivenham House was part of the Beckett Estate. After it was sold in the 1930's it was rented out. I remember a Lady Gifford who lived there soon after the main estate was sold to the War Department and later Lord Bonham-

Carter was in residence there. I believe it was in the 1950's that it became the Commandant's home.

Knapps the builders were very busy when building restrictions were relaxed after the War and built houses in Fairthorne Way and completed the houses on the right hand side of Stainswick Lane. The 2 semi-detached red brick bungalows in Stainswick Lane were bought by the occupants of Shrivenham House as accommodation for their chauffeur and gardener. The cottages by Clifton House which you access from Hazell's Lane are called Jubilee Cottages and commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. The cottages at the top of Stainswick Lane are called Coronation Cottages and were built in exactly the same style as Jubilee Cottages in the year of King Edward V11's coronation.

I don't remember exactly when the old Post Office next to the Men's Institute moved yonder across the road but I clearly remember Miss Lock who was the Postmistress. In her much younger days Miss Lock had worked for Mrs Bennett.

There has always been some sort of military activity in Shrivenham. I remember hearing tales of the Trooping Season and the Manoeuvring season in the Edwardian era taking place long before my time. To give the troops practice the Military used to stage mock battles in the High street between the Blue Army and the Red Army. I believe that Shrivenham was equidistant from the Headquarters of the respective armies. There are several photos in the village taken outside Elm Tree House of soldiers in uniform mounted on horseback. A dreadful accident occurred which fortunately I did not witness but heard about for a long time. Vic Day's grandmother was killed by a military vehicle, a tank, only a few yards from our front door during the last War.

On that day, too, 2 other accidents involving military vehicles happened in our area. At Rowstock on the Abingdon/Newbury road another tank rolled over a staff car. The third accident was at the Shellingford crossroads. Again, I understand a tank was involved. These were all part of large scale manoeuvres and it was very soon after this that all further large scale manoeuvres were done on the Salisbury Plain.

I was too young to serve in World War 2 but in 1946 I was called up under the Duration of Emergency Act. I served in the Army for 2 years. This pre-dated National Service which started in 1949. Following my return to the UK I helped my father in our shop for a short while until it closed before returning to delivering milk in the Swindon area and beyond. It was a way of making a living but meant I had to be out in all weathers and it can be very foggy at 5 o'clock in the morning at times. After my father gave up the shop in 1965 (both he and I could see the way supermarkets were enticing customers away from the smaller shops), I then bought a retail round of my own in Stratton St Margaret and I had that for 3 years. I then bought one at Bampton and had

that for 13 years. At 57 I decided that enough was enough and I then dabbled in antiques for a while until I realised that anything really antique never came to the local merchant. All we had were second-hand odds and ends and furniture. My last little venture was in horticulture, something I ought to have done years ago. In 1994 I bought 7 X 3-month old Friesian calves and kept them in Coppidthorne meadow. When they themselves were in calf, I sold them and replaced them. This venture lasted 3 years.

I can still recall my classmates at Shrivenham School. They were: Peter Anger, Frederick Hambridge, Edwin Knapp, William Curtis, Percy Miller, Gordon Collins, Reg Mildenhall, John Forty, Win Barrett (Shepherd), Pam Ilott, Ivy Dance (Wright), Joan Dance (Milner), and David Baxter.