Joseph Royston Short

Boyhood on a Barford Farm, National Service and a distinguished career - his reminiscences, with annotations and amendments.

I was born 27th July 1938 at Warneford Hospital (now a housing estate) in Royal Leamington Spa, *the son of Joseph (born 24th June 1911) and Lilian (born 17th July 1919)*.

I was christened at St Peter's Church, Barford and confirmed on 19th November 1952 by the Lord Bishop of Coventry at St Peter's Church, Barford.

I lived at No 1 Debden Cottage, Barford. This cottage was on the farm of the same name (Debden Farm) owned by William Canning. We lived here until the demise of Mr Canning in the Autumn of 1952, when the farm was acquired by the Smith Ryland Estate. *(The Church Lamp of July 1951 records that the Canning family had farmed Debden for over 100 years. Debden was the last farm to be owned by the Rectors of Barford and was sold in 1944.)* We then moved to a cottage in the village of Barford owned by the Estate.

I was educated at the village school until 11, then went to a newly built school in Stratford-on-Avon, namely the Hugh Clopton School for Boys, now known as Stratford High School.

During this time we lived on the farm and for fifteen years I enjoyed the freedom and rural environment which I am sure gave me an early start in life rarely enjoyed today. The farm had two employees, Mike O'Reilly who basically looked after the two shire horses Bonnie and Dinah, and my mentor (if that is the right word) who was the chargehand in this day and age, Sam Shepherd (Shep to me).

From an early age I followed Shep everywhere on the farm picking up various functions feeding chickens, feeding and mucking out pigs and hand milking cows. I had my favourite, a very docile Jersey. This job was after school and during holidays. Supervised by Shep, the milk was taken to what was the dairy, put into large metal bowls and left. Later in the day Miss Canning removed the top cream and this was later turned into butter. The residue was used for making superb scones and what was left was given to the pigs for fattening them up.

This was of course during the latter part of World War II when it was austere and rationing was prevalent. Living on a farm then indeed had its privileges.

In the winter months the livestock which were in the fields had to be fed daily with hay, straw and mangles cut up with crushed oats and barley. The hay was cut from a hay rick with a large cutting tool specifically for this purpose; today of course the hay is baled. The cattle kept in the yard were fed and watered daily, with fresh bedding. The used foul bedding was removed into manure stacks to rot down; it was spread across the cultivated land in the autumn of the following year.

In the early spring the pregnant ewes were brought near to the farmhouse in a small paddock. This enabled Shep to keep an eye on them. I remember going out with Shep when the lambing was about to commence. At first this was with a paraffin lamp and later things progressed with the advent of the Bialaddin pressure lamp, which gave out an extremely bright light not affected by windy conditions. As the season progressed some of the ewes threw too many lambs. Sometimes three lambs were born or the ewe was unable to feed them, then they were removed from the mother, kept separately as 'cade' and bottle fed. This bottle feeding I enjoyed; lemonade bottles were used

with a teat fitted and milk from the dairy was warmed up. The lambs became very friendly. When they were old enough, they were introduced to the rest of the flock in the fields and not reliant on bottle feeding when weaned.

As spring came on it was the part of the season for planting of the crops. This needed ploughing and planting and this was undertaken by Mr Canning's son who farmed at Manor Farm in Wasperton. I well remember the orange-coloured Allis Chalmers tractor, which was started up first with petrol then switched over to paraffin once warmed up. This tractor was a 'jack of all trades', in fact it used to propel the combine harvester. In the summer it had a PTO (Power Take Off) fitted which powered the baler and other machinery which needed the PTO.

The picture Jim Crump and Holton at Cadogan's farm with two 'Allis B' models. This model was introduced in 1938 and was probably the type used at Debden.

In school holidays I used to ride on the drilling machine with Shep on the platform at the rear of the drill, checking that the seed was going freely into the ground. Certain fields were used for grazing after the crop was harvested and, in these fields, grass and clover seed was overdrilled once the corn had germinated. This was done with a very light single-wheeled hand pushed drill, attached to which was a wooden pole. One walked up the field in the rut left by the wheel, using the pole to guide the drill to the direct distance between planting, so avoiding double-drilling.

At Debden there was a very large orchard, with all varieties of plum trees. Apples were in a different part of the farm. I well remember helping to pick the plums. The various trees fruited at slightly different times, giving a reasonably long season. They were picked and put into wooden fruit baskets

and were collected in late afternoon by Mr Boyes, a Warwick greengrocer who had premises in Smith Street. He was a pleasant jovial man and he had a Bedford flat-bed lorry. He also collected sacks of new potatoes which were grown in a field adjoining the orchard.

School holidays were the best times. I hardly ever left Debden, spending most days with Shep with a variety of tasks around the farm, from checking on the sheep to mending fences using wood chopped from the willow trees along the brook. These trees were a valuable resource; left to grow they provided perfect fencing posts and rails.

The photograph shows Debden Cottages as they are at November 2024. Number 1 was the nearer part of the building but the two cottages have now been combined into one dwelling.

Towards the middle of July, the corn was ready to harvest and this meant moving gate posts to enable the combine to enter the fields. Usually, the first to be harvested was the barley; it always seemed to ripen first. The combine belonged to Mr Canning's son from Wasperton. It was an American machine, towed by the tractor with the power from its PTO. The cutter bar was in two halves, one being removed to get through the gateways. The combine had a platform on the side with a chute and the operator stood on the platform filling up sacks of grain. The filled sacks were put onto the chute and on a circuit of the field they were dropped at an easy collection point, to be collected by the horse and trailer and taken to the granary. Following the combine was the baler which was pulled by the tractor and also powered by the tractor PTO. At first bales were dropped all over the field but later a sledge towed at the rear of the baler was used. The bales were stacked on

the sledge and dropped at an easy collection point, to be stacked in a rick or taken to the Dutch barn close to the farm.

I must apologise for jumping from various times in my life but as I recall various events they may overlap in timing.

In the winter of 1947 we had very heavy snowfall and high winds which drifted the snow into high drifts, making us snowbound for a few weeks. I remember Dad struggling to get to work (he was a cattle truck driver), climbing over the drifts. But as the roads were impassible the cattle trucks remained in the yard for a considerable time. To help clear the roads I remember a snow blower from the RAF camp at Wellesbourne being deployed. It came through Barford cutting through windows in the frozen snow. The only material put on the roads to give a grip was from a firm in Wellesbourne, Pritchards, which was employed by the Council to put down ash and clinker from the Warwick and Leamington gas works. A man stood on the back of the lorry shovelling the ash across the road. If this happened today Health and Safety would go ballistic! However, I was unable to go to school for a few weeks, not being able to walk through the drifts or even cycle. So I spent the days clearing the snow from around the house and buildings and helping carry hay, fodder and water to the livestock. There was no mains water at Debden; it was all drawn from two wells.

On Tuesdays the cattle market was held in Stratford-on-Avon and one Tuesday during the snow problems, Shep asked if I would like to go with him to the market. This meant passing the school, so on the way to catch the Midland Red to Stratford I had to walk quickly past without being spotted. It was about a mile from the farm to the village and the bus stop, through deep snow most of the way. The bus to Stratford was the 518 which ran every hour. It was a single-decker with no heating and frost on the inside of the windows. This was my first time on a bus to Stratford and little did I realise it would be repeated many times in the future.

After the snow cleared, we had very destructive gales which did a lot of damage uprooting many established trees. It wrecked our hen house, leaving our laying hens wandering around lost, so Dad and I set about rebuilding their pen since we didn't want the fox getting easy meals. Mr Canning allowed Dad to take as much wood from the fallen trees as he wanted, so we built up quite a stack to be sawn up for logs as and when required, helping to eke out the coal.

We lived at Debden in a three-bedroomed semi-detached cottage with no electricity, gas or running water. Our water was from a pump and well in the garden. There was no bathroom, just a tin bath brought in from outside when required and filled with water heated from the boiler in the corner of the kitchen. This was heated by coal and it was also used for the washing of laundry. The lighting was a paraffin Aladdin lamp, the wick being turned up for a brighter light, but when high it smoked. The only radio we had was 'wet battery'. Going to bed was with a candle in a candlestick. There was no heating upstairs and we went to the toilet before going to bed to avoid a jaunt outside in the night.

School, which I mentioned briefly before, was St Peter's Church School in Barford. This was a Victorian building consisting of three rooms with very high ceilings similar to that of a church. There were two cloakrooms and two playgrounds, just covered with tarmac. The school was heated by a large coke fired boiler which was located below ground, some five or six steps down, in a lean-to in the seniors playground. During the day it was the job of some of the senior boys to keep it fully stocked. In each classroom were large fire places which were kept going during lessons to complement the 'central heating'. The fuel hods were filled on a regular basis by the senior boys. There was one room for infants, one for juniors and the other for seniors. At the time I started in 1943 the school took pupils to fifteen; they then left to go into the workplace.

While I was at school the rules changed and at the age of eleven pupils went to Clapham Terrace in Leamington, or for the privileged few to a Grammar School if they passed the eleven plus, which I will explain later. My teacher in the infants was Mrs Sarsfield, who had two sons and retired early to look after the family. She was replaced by Miss Charles from Wellesbourne, who caused great interest because she came to school on an early type of powered cycle which she pedalled to get it started. At this stage I had moved into the junior class where Mrs Calvert was the teacher; she lived in Warwick and travelled every day on the Midland Red 518 service. She was a strict teacher.

At this time there were no school dinners. I don't think they had even been thought of. So rather than walking back to Debden every day I went to my Gran's at No 1 Council House in Mill Lane. A very good friend of mine, Charlie Harris, lived in Bridge Street. We used to wait for each other at the bottom of Mill Lane by the Red Lion pub, to walk back to school. One day a large convoy of American troops stopped on the main road through the village. Charlie and I spent a long time walking up and down this convoy, totally engrossed, time immaterial. Then at some time we decided to go to school, only to be met by pupils leaving school for the day and saying 'you'll be in trouble tomorrow'. I cannot remember being reprimanded, but what an experience. In my last year at Barford a kitchen was built so we started to have a school dinner which was brought in daily from a central kitchen in special heat retaining containers. The meals were hot and good, organised by Mrs Davies who lived in the village.

I think I was about ten when I moved up to the senior class, where the teacher was Mr Twigger, who was also the headmaster. He lived in the school house which adjoined the school and so was very 'hands on'. In the frosty weather he used to tip buckets of water across the playground to create slides for us. (Think of doing that today.) It was in this class that we were introduced to the allotment, which was not far from the school, teaching us to cultivate and grow things, which was nothing new to me. We had no greenfield sportsground, no gym and the only outside recreation was walks around the bridle paths.

One morning we arrived at school to be told to sit an exam, with no other explanation. The questions mystified me, nouns, verbs and factions, without an inkling of what they meant, never having been taught about them. So I filled out as best I could. Later I was told by Mr Twigger that this was an exam for the eleven plus, and those that passed would go to the Grammar School. This was, and still is a gripe. It still riles me that a couple of favourites passed. I still wonder why a certain few in the class were always given special privileges (tutoring). But later in life I proved them wrong, as I will later explain!!!!!

So along comes 1949 and a move to Secondary Modern School. I and my fellow school friends move either to Clapham Terrace in Leamington or a brand-new school in Stratford-on-Avon. The applications must have been successful because we were admitted to the Hugh Clopton School for Boys in Stratford-on-Avon. It meant a bus ride on the infamous 518 Midland Red, seven pence return fare daily, and a further short ride on a Stratford Blue bus to school costing only a couple of pence (in old money).

This was a huge step to such a large school. We started the day with assembly in the main hall, then to one of our classrooms where we were introduced to our form master, Mr Collins, who was also the school gym master. After the register was marked, we either stayed for a lesson with Mr Collins or moved around the school to other classrooms for particular subjects with masters qualified in their specific subjects.

During my years at the school, I was appointed a Prefect and during my last two years I was given the accolade of becoming Head Prefect. What an honour! One day we were in the dining room at lunchtime and some of the dinner ladies were crying, when the Headmaster announced that King George had died.

Then on 19th May 1953 the whole school went by train (steam) on a day trip to London for a coach tour of the Coronation Route for Queen Elizabeth the Second. It consisted of a coach tour with lunch at Tower Hill and a visit to the Tower of London. What a day, arriving back in the late evening. Imagine that happening today.

Every year the school, as I believe is still the case, a production of a play or a musical was staged. I well remember this particular play was Bernard Shaw's St Joan, and the art master said 'Short, it is your part to produce the cover for the programme'. So, using a sheet of lino and a cutting tool I began the cover design. What was to print was left untouched, the remainder was removed and it was mounted onto a piece of board. The image was then inked up and pressed onto paper, and hey presto the result. But of course, before any of this can happen one needs the essentials such as paper and ink.

This is another story and indeed the introduction to my future career, which was to be a visit to a local printer to obtain the basic materials. The smell of a printing workshop and the aroma of printing ink and paper left a lasting impression on me. I had indeed 'caught the bug'.

The following year there was a production of Gilbert & Sullivan's Pirates of Penzance. Yet again I produced the programme.

Then coming to the end of the summer term of 1953 most of my classmates were leaving to start apprenticeships in various trades, engineering, plumbing, electricians and so on. Openings for apprentices were plentiful and employment guaranteed.

So walking from school one day passing the printers who I had previously visited for materials for the school's programmes, in the window was an advertisement for an apprentice compositor. Not knowing what it entailed I applied. Maths and English being an essential element I was employed and signed a seven-year apprenticeship after a suitable induction. Apprenticeships of this length were the norm then. The salary was £1.17.6d per week. That included Saturday mornings, which again was the norm. It was well into my apprenticeship when hours were reduced and Saturday working ended.

During this time I attended the Birmingham College of Art, travelling on steam trains of the day and stopping at every station on the way. Most are closed now. A lot of the central area from Moor Street into the City was still bomb damaged. In 1956 I attended the Coventry College of Art. It had recently opened and it was easier to get to. During the periods at both colleges I obtained City & Guilds certificates in printing categories.

On a lighter note, I must name my employer as they gave me great opportunities alongside training across the broad spectrum of the business. I shall be ever grateful, they were EDWARD FOX & SON, of Greenhill Street, Stratford-on-Avon.

During the years there were various social events such as wayzgooses. These were printers' days out with the 'bosses'. It was a way of thanking the staff for the past year's work. We usually went to London on the Stratford Blue Coaches. I remember on one occasion we went to the London Palladium and saw Harry Secombe doing his famous shaving routine, along with other up and coming stars. I still have the programme. Then after the show we went on to a meal, all laid on by Edward Fox. I remember one years it was at Quaglinos; I think they still exist.

My seventh year of apprenticeship was waived, which was part and parcel of National Service, as it was then. I had my enlistment notice on 6th November 1958, to present myself on 29th November to No 3 Training Battalion, RAOC, Hilsea Barracks, Portsmouth. Prior to this I attended a full medical in Coventry, passing A1 fit. I do not think many of us relished the thought of 2 years of National Service, but what the heck, I intended to make use of this time to my advantage and experience. The posting to 'Pompey' for my basic training was pleasing because I had spent many happy holidays there as my mother's brother, Uncle Jack, was a regular soldier based at Portsmouth in the REME. So I knew Portsmouth quite well.

But of course, it was completely different as a raw recruit. Arriving off the train at Portsmouth Station about mid-day we were ushered into an army truck, later to learn it was a 3 tonner, onward to Hilsea Barracks (now a housing estate). We saw rows of wooden barrack blocks and unimposing Victorian buildings before we were taken into a reception area for tea and biscuits and a general introduction to our weeks ahead.

Then we were off to the barbers. At this time it was 'teddy boy' fashion and some lads had to endure a short back and sides. After that to the Stores for kitting out, not at that time with full uniform but a general duty denim type, and a large piece of brown paper and string. We then formed up in three ranks and the Sarge came along with 'You, first 20, hut so and so..'. I cannot remember my hut number but it was basic, just lockers and metal framed beds. Once we had picked our bed, we were marched to the bedding store to get the mattress and pillows etc. Then, most importantly we were issued with our army number, never to be forgotten. It still remains firmly embellished in the back of my mind, 23598256. Some wrote it down on their hands or anywhere so as not to forget. We were regularly asked to repeat it and woe betide if we forgot – straight off to the cookhouse peeling spuds.

However, after basic training marching up and down, issued with rifles and suchlike, we made an impressive passing out parade, followed by a week's leave then on to Trade Training at Blackdown Camp. Here we were sorted into various abilities and the appropriate trades in which we were to be employed for the rest of our Service. At the end of Trade Training we were issued with travel warrants for ten days leave and told that we would get our posting when we returned on Monday.

When Monday morning came, I was picked up in the early hours by St Nicholas Church in Warwick. The coach had started in Birmingham as quite a few NS and regular soldiers came from 'Brum' and the drivers were 'squaddies' making a few bob on the side.

Arriving back in camp at the morning parade roll call the Sarge came along he ranks. 'Right, you two Didcot, next six off to Ashchurch (a cushy posting, alas not for me), next eight Singapore, four to Hong Kong, the remainder to Cyprus (that included me)'.

Those of us left in that group were upset, to say the least, as Cyprus at that time was in the throes of a serious terrorist 'fight for independence'. There was a lot of terrorist activity with British Servicemen losing their lives. 'Not to worry what comes next' we all said and so off to home on 14-day embarkation leave. On our return rifles were handed in, kit bags packed and we caught he train to Southampton to board the troopship MS Dunerea. This was my first time at sea. There was a decent bunk, usual routines on board and good food. The first stop was Gibraltar to let off troops, then Valletta, Malta. At both ports we had a few hours shore leave. Then we dropped anchor at Limassol, going ashore in tenders. The lucky ones stayed on board, to go through the Suez Canal on their way to the Far East. What postings!

Landing in Limassol we climbed up the steps of the quayside heavily laden with kit bags etc, then at the top of the steps a Sten Gun and a magazine of ammo was thrust into our hands. A good start! We

were lined up in ranks of three and again Sarge came along issuing our postings. He asked if anyone was from the printing business and, although reluctant to volunteer, two of us stepped forward. We were posted to MELF at HQ, Episkopi, with pleasant accommodation overlooking the Med and, in the distance, Akrotiri air base. My home for the next two years was at Episkopi, basically a military camp, in a modern two storey white building with a veranda and all the usual facilities. But this was modern, unlike the UK billets, and more room, with only eight to the room!

When we were settled in our billet the Sarge gave us our deployment. I was to report to Sgt Addis from the MEETS section at MELF. He was an avid supporter of Northampton County Cricket Club, a good friend and boss. I reported to the Guardroom where I was met by Cpl Les Brough and taken to the large complex known as MELF Headquarters. There I met Sgt Alddis who in turn introduced me to the CO, Major Jack Guscott, a true gentleman, and the rest of the staff including L/Cpl Greg Osbourne, a Scot, and two clerks like me.

Over a period of time, I got to know lots of personnel from all the services who worked in HQ. What a lucky posting! We forgot what was going on outside the camp; it seemed irrelevant until of course it was a tour of duty outside our normal working hours, such as guard duty, patrols into Limassol, fire piquets, etc. I was normally on these duties on a weekly turn round; they were after working in the HQ, where we worked from 8.00am to 1.00pm. Otherwise after the morning work we were off to the cookhouse for lunch, then on to the beach. What a life!

I only look back on the good times, but there were without doubt some stressful times.

If you want some Service advice, get on well with the cooks. A couple of cooks became good friends, in the NAAFI and in sport, football and cricket. I never went short of food.

During the first few months we were restricted to the camp due to the threat from EOKA, the terrorist organisation fighting for independence. But once independence was given, we were virtually free to travel the island and we did go to the various camps at Famagusta, Nicosia, Limassol and others, the names of which elude me at the moment. These visits were mainly for recreation breaks, football, cricket and the beaches. The beaches were totally unspoilt and from what one sees today in brochures I believe we were privileged to have been there seeing the beauty of an unspoilt island before the mass building.

After a period of six months, I was promoted to L/Cpl, then after a further nine months to Cpl, with a slight increase in pay and a few pounds a month saved at the local Barclays Bank ready for demob expenses, new clothes etc.

During my service and with my mates we took advantage of what the Army offered. One such was the Army Education Corps, which offered a twelve day ‘Educational’ visit to Jordan, flying from Nicosia to Beirut and on to Jordan. We saw the Wailing Wall, the Way of the Cross, the Garden of Gethsemane and the River Jordan where Christ was baptised. We swam in the Dead Sea (what an experience!) and visited Nazareth, Bethlehem and lots of other places including the Dome of the Rock. What a fantastic holiday. Many years later when married with a family we did a similar tour when on a cruise. This was in 1982 and included a tour of Israel, when Jordan was split between both countries.

My service in Cyprus came to an end in November 1962, boarding the MS Dunera at Famagusta. On the way to the UK the Black Watch were on board, going to Tripoli for a training exercise so the ship was pretty crowded, but after they disembarked it was virtually empty, on board being mainly National Service personnel returning to the UK for demob.

On my return to 'Civvie Street' I rejoined my old firm of Edward Fox of Stratford. As I had completed my apprenticeship I was now classed as a 'journeyman' and after a short period of familiarisation I was given the opportunity of junior management.

This was followed by a career move to Lockheed Hydraulic Brake Co Ltd in Leamington Spa, joining the Publicity Department as Print Controller. There was then an internal move to manage the Printing and Stationery Department. This was supplying the print and stationery requirements for the whole group of companies, some out in empire, Leamington, Speke, Banbury, Bolton and London Office Hill & Jackson. This was quite a group of companies, but now all history.

During this time, I was secretary to the Barford Football Club. On Sunday mornings we held a meeting to pick the team for the following week and it was after such a meeting, on my way to pick up my car, that I met my future wife *Jennifer Sheldon*, and on 26th March 1965 we were married at St Peter's Church, Barford.

Our first home was 38 Coppice Road in Whitnash. When we first saw where our house was to be it was marked out with wooden pegs in a grassed field with cattle grazing.

Our first car was a Ford Prefect NAC 396. It used to fill up the inside with smoke and when it was wet the windscreen wipers were OK until we went up a hill, when they virtually stopped.

Then the family came along, Gillian on 4th February 1966, Andrew on 7th March 1969 and Katie on 1st June 1972. With Katie we could not understand why she just laid in her cot or pram not moving or taking notice of anything. After many visits to see consultants and a brain scan at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham we were told by our consultant, Dr Mc Gregor, the Katie had severe learning disability. He told us he had just commissioned a special unit at Weston-under-Wetherley and we should seriously consider placing her there. We were 'gobsmacked' and there was no way we would ever consider this. The after many visits to the eye specialist at the Warneford Hospital we were informed that Katie had almost no vision and was registered blind.

With the family growing up in a three-bedroom house we thought it would be a good idea to build over the garage. We applied for planning permission thinking this would be a foregone conclusion as similar extensions had already been built. But it was not permitted, not fitting the street scene. So in 1977 we moved from Coppice Road to 1 Church Lane in Whitnash. This is a four-bedroom detached house and we have been there ever since.

That is when I decided to try my luck at becoming a Councillor and at the next local elections, I was duly elected to what was then Whitnash Parish Council. In 1974 following a re-organisation, Whitnash became a Town Council, giving it a greater say in its affairs. I was Chairman of Whitnash Parish Council, then Mayor of Whitnash Town Council. This was indeed a great privilege. In 1991 I was elected to Warwick District Council where I served on various committees, a very interesting period. In 2000 I was elected to become Warwick DC Chairman for 2000/2001, what a great honour! This was a great experience, backed by a great team of officers and here I must mention my right-hand-man that knew all the ropes, my chauffeur Cliff Wiggins.

Also during this period, I served as a Special Constable for 14 years, during which I received in 1988 a Commendation Award from the Chief Constable, Peter Joslin. I was also a member of the Management Committee for Mid Warwicks Victim Support, Leonard Cheshire, Warwick Citizens Advice Bureau and I am a former Chairman of Warwickshire Group Homes.

I served until 2012, when I was forced by ill health to retire from both Councils. In 2012 there was a big shock when I was diagnosed with bowel cancer. I had not been feeling good for some time but it

really hit home. I had a course of radiotherapy at the University Hospital I Coventry and was then operated on at Warwick Hospital. I spent time in the ward while the Olympic Games were on but that was of no interest to me at the time. It took a considerable time to recuperate but touch wood I seem to be OK, having regular checks.

We now have five grandchildren, Matthew, Laura, William, Alesia and Alex.

JRS
March 2016

Postscript:

Joseph died on 26th March 2024; Elizabeth (better known as Jane) having died on 21st January 2024. They are buried together in Barford Churchyard.