

The purchase and upkeep of the Priory and its twelve acres of land was really beyond the means of a retired man, even a bachelor who had earned £3500 a year as a Headmaster. The tragedy of having to sell the house he had so lovingly restored was averted by the generosity of Sir Bernard Greenwell who bought the freehold of the property, guaranteeing him a tenancy for life and an annuity. All the same, he and his staff had to live frugally compared with his previous standards, and during the war, when Will was in the RAF he suggested Mrs. Humphrey could live on her married allowance and he need not pay her! There were no fires in this austere household; rugs and mittens were worn in winter.

Dr Rendall's Flying Standard 9, bought for £75, was laid up during the war because petrol was available only for essential purposes, so he had to fall back on cycling. As a young man he had owned a 58" Matchless penny-farthing, with two steps for mounting, on which he had once cycled 85 miles to Lowestoft in a single day. Now, in his eighties, he rode a very high Sunbeam with a step attached to the rear spindle. To mount he would go 'hicking along' and launch himself into the saddle from behind. He would cycle to Framlingham where he was Chairman of the governors of the college and to dismount he would run into somebody or something. When he was aged 85 the machine had to be taken away, but the subject could never be mentioned; he would never would he admit he had given up his bicycle. In his later years he played tennis, bowls and croquet at the Priory. All these pleasant pastimes were curtailed by the advent of the war in 1939. He was left with only cycling and walking. Wearing a cape and a goatskin cap from Sinai, he vaulted fences and leaped ditches until sometimes he was brought home exhausted.

Each day began in the Priory with morning prayers at nine o'clock. The staff had to kneel on the floor with their heads on a long settee. Prayers had not been said when in February 1944 a large bomb was dropped that exploded in the south meadow. Mrs Humphrey heard it whistle before exploding and she opened the shutters which were kept closed since her master could not be trusted not to show a light at night. She saw, illuminated by fields lit by incendiaries, that the trees all around were plastered with sand and turf, with bones and oyster shells adhering to them. Dr Rendall did not stir, but stayed in bed reading! They feared he might be dead and delayed looking in on him, but in fact, although or perhaps because the crater was thirty feet deep, only one gable was damaged, one window broken and some plaster cracked.

The bomb that fell in the garden made a crater, shaped like a pudding basin and being seventy feet across, made an ideal sunken garden with a duck pond at the bottom approached by steps. The war was drawing to an end and it would no longer be necessary for Dr Rendall to sit during alerts in the air-raid shelter within the thickness of the Priory wall, where he would take supper, a rug around him and the wireless switched on. With the ending of the war he was free to travel again, sometimes staying at the home of his brother Godfrey at Bushey Heath and there on 5th October 1950, he died in his sleep. The last Will had seen of him was when he dropped him at Ipswich station and saw him walking slowly for the train. The news of his death was on the wireless and thus the Humphreys heard they had seen their eccentric employer for the last time. He was buried in the village where he was born, in Oxfordshire, but a door to the old rood loft in Butley church is his local memorial.

## **Vic Harrup**

### **Note:**

Personal communications by Mr and Mrs Will Humphrey. This article first appeared in two issues of 'Twopenny Plain', a broadsheet published in Butley in October and December 1983.