

It is almost as if the world is now only spinning at half speed due to our preoccupation with all things Covid and how easy it is to forget that other things are happening. Radio 4's "On your Farm" this morning was the trigger to start speeding up the world back to normal when one of the contributors was interviewed. Rebecca Pow, currently serving as an Under Secretary to Minister for the Environment in the Government, was talking about her time at Wye Agricultural College. The name jogged my personal memory of Rebecca Pow of 30 years ago as she was then a reporter for BBC Points West and came to the village to cover the story of our local MP, Tom King who had been invited to open the Wootton Courtenay Villagers' Stores.

Tom King at that time was serving as Defence Secretary and the date was 11th January 1991, just five days before the commencement of Desert Storm, the attack on Saddam Hussein's forces following the invasion of Kuwait.

The presence of the Defence Secretary in the village had been advertised in the local press for several weeks. Tom had been very keen to come for two reasons; firstly his mother had lived here in the village in her youth and, secondly, as a politician he was keen to be associated with a "good news" story.

The fact that he was making a public appearance was sufficient opportunity for the World's Press to flock down to West Somerset with the intention of asking the Defence Secretary when the country was going to war. It is no exaggeration to describe the fleet of satellite communication vans that lined the village street as mind-boggling, and even George had to give up worrying about who was parked on his forecourt (!). Tom King was very happy to spend a few minutes unveiling our new shop sign and cutting the ribbon, even to be photographed "buying" a leg of locally butchered lamb, but then spent an uncomfortable hour or so answering questions from the hoard of journalists.

Having failed to get a definitive answer from the Defence Secretary, some of the journalists turned their attention to the locals, and one brave TV reporter asked me if I could suggest a "true local" who would give an opinion on the importance of keeping our village shop. I pointed her in the direction of Buster May-Brown, born in the village, who ran the market garden at Wreford.

Buster was a tall imposing man with a very broad Wootton Courtenay accent and one of his proud boasts was that he had only ever slept away for one night from his home. The intrepid reporter was somewhat at a loss as to what her second question was to be when hearing the answer to her first.

"Have you lived in the village all your life?"

"On no", replied Buster "Not yet".

Those of you who remember Buster will no doubt have an image of the poor girl being overwhelmed by the invasion of her "personal space", as Buster had a habit of standing less than a foot away from you when engaged in conversation. How dear Buster would have coped with concept of Social Distancing is another story.