

## Tom Van Oss

*Richard Van Oss*



In 1936, Tom and his wife, Favell, together with their two children, Richard and John, moved into the The Old Corner House on the Bull Ring [now two houses - The Hermitage and The Old Corner House]. Their third child, Peter, was born after they arrived in Deddington.

Ben and Elsie Kerridge, who arrived with them, were chauffeur/gardener and nanny to the three children (p.14). After Favell and her children moved away from the village the Kerridges remained until 1979.

In the garden of The Old Corner House<sup>7</sup>

Pre-war Tom was a successful London based artist with a studio in Sydney Street, Chelsea. He was also a member of the Artist's Rifle Brigade (TA). In 1936 a naval exhibition at Portsmouth included two portraits of senior admirals by Tom, who was described as "the Navy artist". Several of his pictures, including a portrait of the very distinguished Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, are in the Greenwich Naval Museum. His most famous painting was a response to the threat of war - *Salute to Invader* (verso title page). It showed the new and very secret Vickers 3.7 anti-aircraft gun for which he required special security clearance by the War Office. This morale-boosting painting was first exhibited at the Fine Art Society's gallery in New Bond Street, and was reproduced in the Daily Telegraph on 29 April 1938.

As the war approached Tom joined the Officer's Emergency Reserve. On reporting at the outbreak of war he was selected in a group of about a dozen men for a special course on camouflage. He was given the rank of Captain and appointed Camouflage Officer for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps.

He was posted to France with the Corps leaving on 2 April 1940. He worked for two weeks on the Maginot line and driving about France, and then joined the retreat to Dunkirk and was one of the last to be taken off the beach.

He was promoted to Major in the Northern Command, and made responsible for camouflage for a long stretch of England's east coast. Meanwhile in December 1940 his family had moved to the Oxford area. The income of an army Major was considerably less than as an artist and The Old Corner House was an expensive property to run.

On 3 November 1941 Tom put to sea, with a crew of 15, in a patrol boat off Boston, Lincolnshire, to inspect the coastal defences from the sea. The boat hit one of the first magnetic mines and was blown up; there were no survivors.

<sup>7</sup> The property was known as The Hermitage until at least 1911 but the name was later changed to The Old Corner House. The subsequent owner to the Van Oss family, Cora Collin, had changed it back to The Hermitage by 1955. The property is now divided and both names are used.