

Article transcribed by Vivien Moss, Shrivenham.

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SHRIVENHAM

NEW READING ROOM

THE FOUNDATION STONE LAID BY LORD BARRINGTON

The laying of the foundation stone of a new Reading Room for the parish on Wednesday was an event of great interest to the villagers and will undoubtedly be an epoch in the historical and social annals of the village. An institution of the kind has long been thought about, but it was not until 18 months ago that the Vicar, the Rev. E.F. Hill, who is ever solicitous for the welfare of his parishioners, set to work in earnest, and by combining "doing" with "talking", by consulting here and soliciting there, by enlisting the sympathy and support of friends from far and near in the good cause, and with the cordial assistance of many of the parishioners, succeeded in collecting and placing in the bank the handsome sum of £500, thus enabling the committee to place the matter in the hands of the builders. No wonder that the bells of the Parish Church were rung, that the flags should be flying, and that the inhabitants should assemble "en masse" to witness the interesting ceremony of laying the foundation stone of what will be a handsome building, and an institution which will be of great benefit to the people of Shrivenham now and for many generations to come.

The site for the building, adjoining the Post Office, and the stones to be used in the structure (dug on the Beckett estate) have been generously given by Lord Barrington. The building will be of stone, with Bath stone dressings. Its length will be 46 feet and width 22 feet 6 inches, with a committee room at the back 12 feet by 10 feet. A fixed screen will form a kind of vestibule lobby, and there will be a moveable screen in the centre of the room. The building will be heated by two open fire-places. The estimated cost, exclusive of furnishing, is £500, and the builders are Messrs Cadel Bros of Faringdon. The building is expected to be completed in September next.

Lord Barrington, who had kindly consented to lay the foundation stone, arrived punctually to time, accompanied by the Vicar and Mrs Hill, Col. C.G. Edwards, Mr A.W. and Miss Fairthorne, the Rev. B.M. Hawes, Mr A.P. MacNamara, and amongst others present were Mr R. Hedges, Mr Day, Mr and Mrs Millard, Mr Hall, Mr Wilson, the Misses Snook, Mr Lawrence, Mr Stephens, Mr and Mrs Olliver, Mr Kent, Mr Knapp, Mr Wright, Mr Cooper, etc.

The Vicar said if he had anything to say in connection with the business for which they were met just now, the words that suggested themselves first of

all were words to welcome his Lordship amongst them to take part in their proceedings today, and he was sure he was only voicing the wishes of all who were present by first of all offering to his Lordship an expression of the appreciation of their sense of his kindness in coming for the purpose for which they had asked him to come today, namely, to lay the foundation stone of their new Reading Room, Club Room, Parish Institute, or whatever name they might elect hereafter to give it. His Lordship was always good to them, and they were grateful to him for all the interest he shewed in whatever concerned their welfare. It was to him personally, and to all who had the cause of their new room at heart, a matter of real satisfaction and gratification to think that the idea of the Reading Room, which they had conceived some 18 months ago, had met with such favour, had been so kindly and cordially received, and had been so liberally and so substantially supported that they were now able to see its walls beginning to rise from the ground. And he was not using, he thought, any words of mere politeness or flattery when he said that feeling which they had of satisfaction and gratification was in a large measure due to what his Lordship had done to help them in what they had been trying to achieve, to the sympathy with which he had received the enterprise from the very first time he spoke to him about it, to the kindly interest that he and his family had shewn in it, and what is more than all, to the generous support that he had given to it; and it was not too much to say that the idea of the room, such as they had thought about, talked about, and schemed for, would but for his hearty co-operation with them, be still "a castle in the air". With regard to the completion of the building, the contractors had promised that it should be ready for their use at the end of September. He saw Mr Cadel present, and he must take it from him that he meant what he said, that if the building was not finished by then they would make his life as unpleasant and as undesirable for him as it was possible for average human beings to do (laughter). He hoped, therefore, that sometime towards the end of September they would all meet again in that particular part of the village, not outside, but inside the walls of their new room, and that they would again have Lord Barrington with them on that occasion to take part in its formal opening (hear, hear). He should like to make a statement of a practical character and say something of their financial position, and he thought that the statement he could make would commend itself as being not unbusiness-like or entirely unsatisfactory. Before the committee resolved on expense or risk of any sort in regard to the building, they had to their credit at the bank, through the kindness of a great many friends, the sum of £500, and that, they thought was sufficient to justify their beginning the work, and he thought, if they were not too extravagant in their ideas, they would want another £100 to see the thing well through, and they would then have the building well furnished and equipped and free from anything like a debt. He was not very anxious about that £100; it had not begun to keep him awake yet, for he hoped and believed that by some means or another, it would be forthcoming to enable them to complete the work they had begun. He was sometimes reminded that his public utterances were of too lengthy a nature, and this was brought home to him only on Sunday evening last (laughter). He assured them he was very anxious indeed not to lay himself

open to even a suspicion of such a charge as that, and without further words he would ask Lord Barrington to accept from his lips an acknowledgement of their sensibility of the goodwill and of the kindness he had shewn them, and he further asked him to accept at his hands this trowel which was the gift to him (Lord Barrington) of many of his Shrivenham friends, and with that trowel he had to ask him, in the name of all who were there present, that he would turn his hand to the art of masonry, and that he would show such skill in that department of human work by well and truly laying the foundation stone of the building, which he was presumptuous enough to think, and which he believed was his Lordship's opinion also, would not only be an ornamental feature to their village street, but a building that would meet a long-felt and very real need amongst them, a building that as a place for meeting, a place for healthy recreation and wholesome amusement, would be the means, he hoped, of promoting a sense of union, harmony, good feeling, goodwill and good fellowship amongst the members of their little Shrivenham world (cheers). My Lord, I would ask your acceptance of this trowel.

Lord Barrington accepted the trowel, which was of silver, with an ivory handle, and bore the following inscription:- "Presented to the Right Honourable Viscount Barrington on the occasion of his laying the foundation stone of the Shrivenham Club Room on May 19th 1904.

Mr A.W. Fairthorne then made a few appropriate remarks. He said it was a great pleasure to him at his advanced age, as one of the oldest, if not the oldest Shrivenham man, to be present on an occasion of that kind, in the first place to thank their Vicar for the great trouble he had taken in providing what would prove, he hoped and trusted, a most useful institution, and would also tend to the enlightenment, and he might say to the education, indirectly, of the younger people of the village. In the second place he must thank his Lordship for giving the site for the building, and in addition to that, thank him for honouring them with his presence today to lay the first stone of the building. He felt very strongly on the subject of Reading Rooms, and thought that every village ought to have one. There was a great cry for technical education, and he thought it was a pity that the education received by boys at school, should run to waste after they had left school, and that they should forget what they had learnt, especially at the present day, when they found that Germany and other foreign countries were treading on their heels in point of education. He felt a great interest in this matter in consequence of what occurred nearly 50 years ago, during the time of their old Vicar, Archdeacon Berens. At that time Mr Cawley was curate there and had charge of the parish and Mr George Glynn, afterwards Lord Wolverton, was living at Shrivenham House, and his friends from Maidenhead used to come down from time to time and give lectures in the Reading Room which then existed. He, Mr Fairthorne, at that time used to make frequent journeys to London. He took a great interest in elemental chemistry, and used to make a point of attending the lectures given by Professor Pepper at the Polytechnic Institute, and then occasionally he used to give a lecture in the Reading Room. But

with the death of Archdeacon Berens, the removal of Mr Cawley and Mr Glynn, the Reading Room was discontinued which was very much to be regretted. Now, they were going to have a new Reading Room, and he wished it every possible success (cheers).

The laying of the stone was then proceeded with. It was suspended by pulleys over its prepared site, in the centre of which was a cavity in which the Vicar placed a bottle containing "The Times newspaper, a letter written by the Vicar giving some account of the building, and several silver and copper coins. The cement having been laid by Mr Cadel's foremen, (Mr G. Bowler), his Lordship also using his silver trowel for this purpose, the stone was lowered into position, his Lordship ascertained by the spirit level that the stone was in an upright position, and then tapping it with a small mallet, he said: "I declare this stone to be well and truly laid", an announcement which was received with hearty cheers. The inscription on the stone is as follows:-

This stone was laid by Walter Bulkeley, IXth Viscount Barrington, May 19th 1904.

Lord Barrington then gave a short address. He said the Vicar was wrong about one thing he said at the start, viz, that 18 months ago they began talking about this room. If his recollection served him aright their last Vicar began talking about it 20 years ago. A much needed want in the parish of Shrivenham was a room of that kind, and he only hoped that after all the trouble and expense they had been to in providing it, the people of Shrivenham would appreciate it - (hear, hear) - and that when some day, as he hoped to do, he came to live amongst them again, and went to the Reading Room to look at the paper, he did not wish their secretary to tell him he had no business there (laughter). He thanked them very much for the magnificent silver trowel which they had presented to him. He hoped the Reading Room, the foundation stone of which he had laid today, would be a vast and enormous success, and be a pleasure to all of them. The Vicar had expressed a wish that he (Lord Barrington) would be present at the opening of the Room. He could only say that if he was alive he was certain to come. He was very much obliged to them for everything they had done and said. (Cheers).

Cheers were then called for and heartily given for Lord Barrington and the Vicar, and Lord Barrington asked them to give three cheers for all who had come to see the show, and especially for Colonel Edwards who had come the farthest of them all. It was jolly good of him to come, and he should like him to say a few words, for he was the most splendid orator he knew.

The request for cheers having been heartily responded to, Colonel Edwards said that as his Lordship had asked him to say a few words he would do so, but only a few. The Vicar began by saying he was only going to say a few words, but then he knew a great many more than he (Colonel Edwards) did.

It was the habit of the Clergy who were trained to talk a great deal (laughter). Sometimes they did not tell them exactly what they liked to hear, but their Vicar always did, and he was sure that everyone present had listened to his remarks that afternoon with the greatest admiration and the greatest pleasure. The Clergy had one great advantage over others. They were able to say exactly what they liked without the slightest fear of interruption or contradiction, but poor civilians did not get that privilege; were it so he would venture to say a great deal more than he should now attempt or try to say (laughter). He agreed with all his remarks, and with one especially. It was the greatest pleasure to all of them, and to him particularly to see their old friend, his Lordship, there amongst them. Far from it being a trouble for him (Colonel Edwards) to come, it had given him the greatest pleasure, if only in a little degree to help support the Vicar in one of the numerous good works he did amongst them, but especially was it a pleasure to come and see their old friend Lord Barrington. He trusted that they would all meet again on perhaps as bright and brilliant a day, to take part in the opening of the useful and admirable institution (cheers).

This concluded the proceedings.