

From the House of Lords Library

As from Beech Close  
Cambridge Road  
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Bucks

Some Notes written after reading the two papers by Maj E.R.A. Sewell entitled "*Beckett*" and "*Further Notes on Beckett*" in the Journal of the Military College of Science.

As I spent much of my boyhood at Beckett, which was the home of my maternal grandmother, Lady Barrington, it may be useful if I put on record my memories which add to Major E.R.A. Sewell's two articles.

1. The last Viscount Barrington to live at Beckett was the Ninth, who died in 1933. He married twice, as described on the memorial on the West wall of Shrivenham Church. His second wife, whom he married in 1905, was the widow of John Arden Birch and a grand-daughter of Field-Marshal Sir John Burgoyne, commemorated elsewhere in the College. By their first spouses, Lord Barrington had 7 children and Lady Barrington 5. My mother was her second daughter. Before Lord Barrington died in 1933, both had celebrated their second Silver Weddings.

2 The Village Hall was built as a war memorial after the first World War, the funds being raised under the leadership of Lady Barrington. Lord Barrington was extremely keen on cricket having been an excellent cricketer himself as a younger man. The present village cricket ground was created at the same time; previously a field beside the walk to the Church had been used. Lord Barrington for several years brought a team consisting largely of County & University players to take on the village who always gave a good account of themselves.

3. In the 1920's Lord Barrington sold the whole estate and Lord and Lady Barrington moved to Rickmansworth Park, which Lady Barrington had inherited. The purchasers sold off the agricultural land and were reputed to be expecting to sell the house and grounds for a school. This did not materialise and after a time Lady Barrington bought back Beckett House and grounds, at the same time selling Rickmansworth Park, which is now the Royal Masonic School for Girls.

4 When Lady Barrington purchased the house, she embarked on an extensive programme of renovation. The nursery and kitchen wing was demolished, as was the large conservatory and certain outhouses. The conservatory was in a bad condition and some of the trees in it were penetrating the roof. Many alterations were made internally, especially to the kitchen and dining arrangements. Mains electricity was installed – previously the house had had its own generator. It was reputedly one of the first country houses in England to have electric light installed, which was done when the house was let at about the turn of the century to Whitehead, the inventor of the torpedo. The original generating set, a gas engine with anthracite gas producer, was in use till the early 1920's.

5 As Major Sewell records, the architect of the house was a protégé of Shute Barrington, Bishop and Prince Palatine of Durham for 35 years. The income of the Prince Bishop was very large and it was reported that Beckett was built at his expense with a view to his retirement there. However he died before Beckett was completed.

6 The layout of the house, before the alterations following its repurchase, was as follows as far as the principal rooms were concerned. On entering by the front door, the room on the left was the library and on the right the billiard room, beyond which was a gun room etc. Advancing to the middle of the central hall, the room on the left was the large drawing room or salon, and the room before one the morning room, which was used for all meals.. The room between the salon and the morning room, at the centre of the house, was the yellow drawing room. The dining room, which was rarely used, opened out of the morning room on the opposite side to the yellow drawing room. The kitchen passage opened out of the central hall, in the corner between the walls of the morning room & main staircase. Another passage led, at right angles to the kitchen passage, to the back door.

One entered the stable yard under an archway to find the kitchen/nursery wing on the left, and a row of stables and outhouses on the right. At the far end of the yard was another archway, with, on the right, the gas engine room & producer room adjoining, and on the left, the battery cell room.

When the house was renovated in the 1920's, the conservatory and kitchen/nursery wing were pulled down as already stated. A cottage for the chauffeur was built in the stable yard. The old billiard room was turned into the dining room & new kitchens etc constructed beyond it. The billiard table was moved to the old morning room.

As one turns from the old drive into the approach to the house, there is little difference apparent from the time it was a private house. The lawn tennis courts were on the right. As one walks up to the house the main feature which strikes one as different is the area beyond the lake on the left which is more open than it used to be. The lake appears enormous as there were hardly any rushes. Their increase appears to be due to a lowering of the level of the lake.

7 To finish on a more personal note, I was born in November 1908 and spent much of my boyhood at Beckett. I always thought of Lord Barrington as my grandfather and it seems to be curiously modern that the children called him by his Christian name, Walter. He had an enormous circle of friends, most of whom called him Moony Barrington. He was lame, having evidently had a slight stroke quite early in his life. His greatest interests were cricket and his old school, Eton. His fund of cricket stories was legion. My grandmother was involved in various charities, and in the early 1920's much of her time was taken up with the building of the village hall and homes for disabled ex-Service men round the new cricket and recreation ground. The two made a devoted couple.

As we grandchildren grew up, Beckett became an open house for us and our friends. Lord and Lady Barrington loved having young people around, and, as long as we all turned up punctually and tidily for meals, we could do pretty well what we liked. Before the house was renovated it was inconvenient by modern standards. The

electricity supply was unpredictable and the kitchen a Sabbath's day journey from the room where we fed. After the restoration it became much more habitable though a good deal smaller.

On visiting Beckett again, I found a surge of personal memories coming to my mind. It was good to see the whole place put to such good use, full of young people as it was 50 years ago.

This article was not signed. From the personal information given it appears that James, Montague Burgoyne Stopford, 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Courtown wrote the above. He was born on 24 November 1908 and died 23 July 1975

Transcribed by Vivien Moss 5 May 2022