

A transcript from the Swindon Advertiser 25 July 1925
(Transcribed by Vivien Moss)

**SHRIVENHAM
LADY BARRINGTON'S
EX-SERVICE MEN'S HOME
BY
HER ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS
BEATRICE**

The praiseworthy efforts of Lady Barrington to provide cottage homes for disabled ex-service men in Berkshire are perhaps not so widely known as they deserve. Her Ladyship has been engaged for some years in this endeavour, and with the help of many friends in many ways she has succeeded in a remarkable way, and her village homes at Shrivenham are an example which might well be followed in other localities. The principal object is to provide homes for disabled ex-service men having about 40 per cent of disablement. Eight cottages of a type which is generally acknowledged to be admirable in design and position and have been erected, six bordering a large recreation field connected with the scheme, and two outside, all of which are tenanted. In addition to the cottages, in one or two instances there are workshops which will enable the men to follow the trade to which they have been accustomed. Lady Barrington's scheme is directed by a Committee of the Village Homes Association, which includes the Viscountess Barrington (Chairman), the Lady French, Mrs Matheson Fraser, the Rt Hon. Sir Frederick Milner, Bart., Major-General Sir John Adye, K.C.M.G. CB and Charles Small Esq., with Capt. Ashley Foakes, RN. as Treasurer, and Mr S.S. Murch as Chartered Accountant. The cottages are for married men, and although they are worth 15s 6d a week rent, the men are only charged 3s 6d per week, or for shop and cottage 4s 6d, the rates to be paid in addition.

There has now been added to the Shrivenham scheme a new Welfare Institute, which will enable all the educational and social advantages to be secured, and is commodious enough to answer every call which may be made upon it. The spacious building, which is to go by the name of the Shrivenham Village Homes and Institute for Disabled Ex-Service men is built on the border of the Recreation Ground, and faces the Highworth and Swindon Roads, whilst on its other front the whole of the Recreation Ground is in full view, and from an

open annexe all games, etc, taking place can be witnessed. The main building is 60 feet long by 40 feet wide. It has an exterior of grey stone with an old-fashioned tiled roof, and the windows are arranged in the mediaeval style. The building is of ample proportion, being both long and lofty. The main entrance is reached by a wicker gate and thence a path of old stone. The central oaken door, which shows some fine carving, gives access to the large hall in which the opening ceremony was performed. The hall is on the left of the entrance, while on the right are arranged a group of other rooms including that set apart for the men.

A striking feature of the central hall is the open roofing. This has been carried out on the amber beam principle of identical pattern to that of the Westminster Abbey roofing, and which is admittedly the best available. Oak-tongued grooved flooring provides another noticeable feature, both the hall floor and that of the large raised platform being of the same fine material. The hall itself is roomy and well ventilated, and despite its spaciousness, gives an impression of cosiness and comfort. Among other of the many rooms are those set apart for the use of the entertainers, the kitchen and refreshment rooms, while there are several pantries and other conveniences. The long gallery, which at once attracts attention is approached by a flight of fire-proof stone stairs. The heating is central and there is electric lighting. Among other interesting features of the Institute is the loggia, which gives access to a central sweep of sward. Each of the many windows bears the old-fashioned lead lights and these lend a picturesque air to the very attractive building.

Saturday last proved a red letter day to the inhabitants of the village, for it was on this day that the new Welfare Institute was opened, and a great honour was paid to the village and to all concerned, by a visit of Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice, who graciously performed the opening ceremony.

A large number of influential persons who have taken an interest in Lady Barrington's scheme were invited, as guests by Lord and Lady Barrington, and most of them were present. They included Lord and Lady Barrington, Lord and Lady Stopford and the Hon. Patricia Stopford, Lady Fitzgerald, Lord Shaw, Lady Talbot-de-Malahide, Lord Faringdon, Sir Frederick Milner, Sir John Adye, Sir Clarendon and Lady Hyde, Sir John Latta, General and Mrs Mayne, Major Ralph Glyn, MP and the Hon Mrs Glyn, Major and Mrs Marshall, Col W H Ames and Mrs and Miss Ames, Mr and Mrs Du Pre, Mr Romaine Walker, Mr and Mrs Sandford, Mr and Miss Phillipson, Mr Jenkins, Mr and Miss Butler, Mrs Steadman, Mr Purbrick, Mrs Hippisley, Mr and Mrs Owens, Mr and Miss Bliss, Mrs Pim, Capt and Mrs Ashley Foakes, Capt and

Mrs Roberts, Capt and Mrs J T Colledge, Dr A P Macnamara, the Mayor and Mayoress of Swindon (Ald and Mrs R Evans), Mrs Philips, Mrs Henty, the Rev E F and Mrs Hill, Col and Mrs Heath, Mrs Harter, Mr and Mrs Radcliffe Platt, Mr and Mrs Williamson, Mr and Mrs Lloyd Thomas, Mr and Mrs Sandow, Mr and Mrs Argente, Mrs Morton Phillips, the Hon Mrs C Craven, Mr J H S Birch, Mr and the Hon Mrs Frank Birch, Mr Thornehill and Mr Elliott (Reading), Mr Gurney, Mr Victor Cochran and Miss Cochran, etc.

Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice travelled from Paddington by the 11.40 express, which halted at Shrivenham Station, whence Her Royal Highness proceeded to the village in a motor carriage. Arriving at the Welfare Institute she was welcomed by Lord and Lady Barrington and others and was presented with a beautiful bouquet, which was handed to her by little Miss Schofield, daughter of one of the ex-Service tenants of one of the new homes. A guard of honour was formed by the local Girl Guides in command of Miss Ames, of Bourton, (Commissioner for the district), and Brownies, under the supervision of Miss Oliver (Brown Owl). The Band of the 14.20 Hussars from Tidworth, under the command of Mr Robinson, L.R.A.M., was present by permission of Col Hurndall and as Her Royal Highness alighted from the carriage the National Anthem was played. The Princess was accompanied to the Institute along a carpeted footway from the gates to the entrance, and a number of ladies and gentlemen accompanied her on the platform and it may be mentioned that the curtain with which the stage was draped were kindly lent by the proprietors of the Prince of Wales' Theatre.

Lady Barrington, in opening the proceedings, said:-

Your Royal Highness, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very glad to welcome you all here this morning on this happy occasion, the opening of our settlement and Welfare Institute for disabled ex-Service men of this neighbourhood, the Memorial Hall to the men of the village who went from us and fell in the Great War. But before we ask Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice to most kindly to declare our Institute to be open, it may be as well to explain the origin of our scheme, and the lines on which it has developed in recent years.

Our work, which as you know, is primarily concerned with the welfare of disabled ex-Service men in rural areas, though it aims also at the betterment of social conditions in country districts, is the outcome of a scheme for the revival of village social life which was initiated at Shrivenham a short time before the outbreak of the war, and was then

inspired by the recognition of the deplorable dullness of social conditions in life in the villages in the early years of the present century.

Many of us can remember the conditions then existing in the country parishes. Low wages, long hours of work, and few compensating advantages in leisure hours. If the men had their cricket and football clubs and games of billiards, for the women there was no distraction from the monotonous round of household duties, and the hard struggle to make both ends meet on a then totally inadequate income, while the young people, with no playing fields, and little in the way of healthy exercises and games, were dependent on the half-yearly school treat, walks in dusty lanes, and games performed in the village street, as their share of social life.

A close study of the problems involved in any reform of these conditions led to the conviction that three things were absolutely necessary for any real revival of village social life and these three things were, a recreation ground where the old could rest and the young could play, a hall or institute, the centre of all village life and interests, and the means by forming various clubs and associations, of brightening the lives of old and young alike.

Though all this, it was evident, would take time to mature, as a first step towards our village Utopia a social worker was engaged to live in the village and carry out some of the ideals; and in a short time social evenings, day classes and organised games for the young people worked a great improvement in social life at Shrivenham, while a women's village industry in the form of a working class brought together the women of this and neighbouring parishes on social lines and enabled them, by the sale of the things they made, to supplement their husbands' wages. But alas, the war put an end to these activities, and as it progressed, we all felt that in our future plans the claims of the disabled men of the place must assume a primary importance.

During the last two years of the war we built three cottages and laid out the recreation ground, and by way of resuming our work, but on revised lines, we formed an association of which the aims and objects were, and are, to provide for disabled ex-Service men in rural areas, having 30 or 40 per cent of disability, pleasant homes, suitable occupation and the means of enjoying (equally with the rest of the village inhabitants) a fuller and brighter social life in their own villages, instead of banishing them to settlements elsewhere, for it was found after the Boer War that the men, if sent to a distance, almost invariably wished to return after a time to be nearer their former homes.

Our great object was to provide cottages to receive the disabled men as they were demobilised or discharged from the Convalescent Homes, and to give them the

openings they could not find for themselves, but which would enable them, by supplementing their pensions, to earn a comfortable livelihood. It was clear that some of these men, unable to gain regular employment owing to inability to work continuously through the day, could still do well if working in their own workshops and in their best hours. Care was therefore taken to admit to our homes only men of good character and likely to make a success of their various trades.

A further object was to provide in a Welfare Institute the social and educational advantages which would add to the attractions of village life, and make those who had had such adventurous times abroad happy and content in their home surroundings.

But all these enterprises must eventually depend on the L.S.D. and a London Committee (of which I am Chairman) was formed in the same year to raise funds by entertainments, bazaars, dances, etc to carry through our scheme, and has by continued efforts through the following years, and with the generous assistance of friends, and of members of the theatrical profession, raised a very considerable amount, sufficient to bring us so far on our way. A grant of £2,000 from the Red Cross, and £1,000 raised by our Berkshire appeal in 1918 also materially assisted us in launching our work.

You see around you today the fruits of our efforts, and I trust they will prove that we are working on the right lines.

We have made our recreation ground out of a ploughed field. We have built eight cottages with good gardens and workshops attached, and a flat in the Welfare Institute, we have completed the hall save for the second extension wing, and our disabled men, all of whom are married and come from a radius of five to six miles, are in good trades, with the exception of one thrown out of his job by the closing down of a factory in which was employed.

The Welfare Institute to be opened today will not only provide, as I explained, many social and educational advantages, but should, in view of the various purposes for which the hall will be hired out, both for village and county use, go far in enabling us to realise our great ambition of making the whole scheme self-supporting.

It has been a pleasant but arduous task. We have encountered difficulties. We have met with criticisms, some probably justified and some unjustified. At times it has seemed almost impossible to combine the selection of candidates and the endeavours to find them a trade with the further work of designing the hall and cottages, of raising funds, and the organisation and administration of the various details of the scheme.

But a determination to carry through at all costs the trust that Providence helped in such a cause, and the reliance that could be placed on the loyal co-operation and devoted service of our Committee, and on our friends on the stage, made all things possible, and when circumstances seemed somewhat discouraging, a visit to our settlement, and the recognised well-being of our men seemed to inspire to even greater efforts.

I confess I should have been glad if our efforts were now ended, but I foresee still two more years of strenuous work before us.

We must pay off our loan and mortgage, and provide a small endowment fund. We much wish to build a laundry, the great need of the neighbourhood, and which, as a village industry, would give employment not only to our people, but to others if so desired. We also wish to build two more cottages for which applicants are waiting, and quarters for an administrator here. With this somewhat ambitious programme before us, our exertions cannot be said to be over yet. We recognise we should never have so nearly reached our goal without the extraordinary kindness we have received on all sides.

Speaking on behalf of our Association, we feel we can never sufficiently thank the members of our London Committee who have worked so incessantly and whole heartedly for our homes, nor the kind friends who have themselves organised bridge tournaments and dances on our behalf, and handed us substantial cheques as the result, nor those again who have, year after year, or I may say month after month, taken tickets for our entertainments, and others whose generous gifts of £500 and upwards have enabled us to build the cottages now named after the donors. The Stanley, Small, Purbrick, Craven, Barrington, Robey and Bouchier cottages were all provided in this way, while the extension wing of this hall receives Mr Laddie Cliff's name in grateful recognition of the £1,200 he has raised by the cabaret entertainments he has given us, enabling us to carry out this part of the building. And we would thank most heartily Sir A. Stanley for his timely gift on behalf of the Red Cross of £2,000 when we commenced our work. Also Mr Sandford for the generous loan which tided us over a critical time, Mr Rivers for helping us to launch our appeal, and the members of the theatrical and musical hall stages, including Sir Gerald du Maurier, Mr G. Robey, Mr Charlot, Mr and Mrs Bouchier, and others who took their part in the cabaret entertainments for their splendid and unfailing support.

May I add one word of most sincere thanks to H.R.H. Princess Beatrice, who by her unfailing kindness and help since we started the scheme, has helped us to persevere, and has so kindly undertaken this long journey today to honour us by her presence and to open our Welfare Institute for us.

I fear I have spoken at length, but have only one word to add as regards possible criticisms of our scheme. First, we are indeed aware that we are only helping a very few of the disabled ex-Service men still unemployed throughout the country, but it is hoped that this first example of what it is possible to do for these men will be the precursor of many more, and we claim that if this scheme were adopted in all the counties of England, the greater number of these disabled ex-Service men in rural areas would be absorbed in happy and well occupied lives. Again, we are aware that the cost of the present undertaking might deter others from similar efforts. We would, therefore, explain that only one such headquarter settlement as ours is needed in each county, and could now be built at almost half the expense we have had to incur, carrying out our work at the most expensive period of building operations. Again, as we have said, these Institutes should be self-supporting. But in the majority of cases, two or three cottages in each village would meet the needs of the disabled men of the place, while an extension to an existing village hall to bring it up to modern requirements would not involve a heavy outlay.

But I feel for my part no apology is needed for the money we have spent on such an object. If many who can afford it, spend thousands on some work of art, or picture masterpiece, surely it is justifiable to spend as much on what will not only add to the happiness and well being of this generation, but of many generations to come. And for our disabled men expenditure is still more justifiable when we consider, apart from the handicap in life's battle which disability entails, what the loss of robust health – of what is worse to some, of participation in sport, of youthful buoyancy and spirits – must mean to those men who will never feel young again, and who are often boys barely out of their teens. These men who have suffered so much in our cause, deserve the best at our hands.

At the same time I would urge that those who benefit by the advantages provided here, more especially the village inhabitants, now indirectly profiting by the generous efforts of our London Committee and friends on behalf of disabled men, should now take their share in the upkeep of the place, and a pride in the proper management of the Welfare Institute and grounds, and I trust that the local committee about to be formed will exercise a wise discretion and a due sense of proportion in the allocation of opportunities for education and for amusement. Pleasures and distractions in life are all to the good if not carried so far as to incapacitate for work, and I am certain that advantages are only truly enjoyed when those participating in them have contributed time, thought, and money to a certain extent, in the cause.

Sir J. Adye, one of the leading members of our Committee, and Captain Ashley Foakes, our Treasurer, will say a few words before we ask Her Royal Highness to kindly open

our Welfare Institute, and Lord Barrington will then propose a vote of thanks to Princess Beatrice, which will be seconded by Sir Frederick Milner.

Major General Sir John Adye, in a brief address spoke of the work which had already been done, and said that the initiative was that of Lady Barrington and without her great energy it would not have been done, and great praise was due to her for the work she had put into the scheme during the last few years. He spoke of the value of the scheme, and said that Lady Barrington had set an example to the whole country.

Captain Ashley Foakes, R.N., said he had been asked as Hon. Treasurer of this fund to say a few words on the financial aspect of the undertaking. But he would like to make a few general observations at the outset. They had heard from Lady Barrington of the inception and of the gradual growth of this work, they had had the opportunity of inspecting the building and the lay-out of the settlement, and he thought they would all agree that, so far as possible, while keeping in mind the comfort and convenience of the tenants, considerable thought and care had been exercised to secure that the settlement as a whole should appeal to the artistic and aesthetic eye. These results which have been so happily achieved, had been the work entirely of Lady Barrington. She had been indefatigable in caring for and personally looking after all these matters, she had directed and arranged each question as it arose, and no detail had ever been too small for her to think out, consult upon it, and finally pursue it to a happy and satisfactory conclusion. As regards the financial aspect of the fund it may perhaps be of some interest to say that all the money which their friends had subscribed from time to time was wholly expended on the work in hand. That was to say that all services such as secretarial and management were rendered gratuitously. Concerning the financial side of this work it would probably interest them to know that, of the total of £20,421 which has been raised from the year 1916 until the end of the last year, £2,000 was given by the Red Cross Society, and just over £1,000 was raised as a result of a broadcast appeal through the Press. Practically the whole this latter amount was subscribed by Berkshire supporters. The remainder of this large sum had been raised principally through the agency of Lady Barrington's unremitting energy in organising matinees, concerts, flag days, bazaars and hosts of other entertainments by which help was extracted from kind and charitable helpers. The settlement consisted at present of two pairs of cottages and a single one. The latter was built on so as to form a pair. There were in addition two shop cottages fronting the main street of the village. The Hall and Institute supplied a rallying place not only for the ex-Service men and their families, but accommodated also the whole village. It was hoped that in the future the

nearby members of the British Legion and of the Old Comrades association would find in the Hall a place to foregather and to meet old friends and companions-in-arms of the Great War. He need hardly say that they would always find a sympathetic welcome. The present position was that they had acquired 15 acres of land, for which as regards 10 acres they paid £100 each, the remainder varying in cost between £60 and £100 an acre. On this land they had built the cottages and the Hall, and had constructed a road and planted trees and made a recreation ground. Moreover each cottage had a sizeable garden which should be capable of supplying all the requirements in the shape of vegetables etc for the tenants. In connection with this item of expenditure he would point out that the Beckett Estate – that is of course – Lord Barrington, bore the entire cost of construction of one pair of cottages; and on this part of the undertaking together with the land purchased they had a mortgage on very easy terms. They felt very strongly that their immediate endeavour should be directed to clear off this debt, and he was happy to say that they had every hope that they would be able to do this during the autumn of this and next year.

The incoming rents, which were not charged on an economic basis, together with the small subscriptions paid by the cricket, tennis clubs and the like, for the use of the recreation ground, were not sufficient to defray the outgoings represented by maintenance and upkeep charges. In these circumstances the Committee had given very serious consideration to the question of what should be done to put the whole arrangement on a self-supporting basis, and they had come to the conclusion that this position could be attained by an industry in which some of the disabled men and their wives could take a really useful part. It was not easy to fix upon an industry which, without competing with local trade and connections, would show sufficient profit to make it worth while. But Lady Barrington and the Committee, after consultation with experts had been advised that a well-fitted and modern laundry would provide the means they were seeking. It was their intention, therefore, when funds were available to erect such a laundry. It was estimated that the sum required for this purpose would run into about £1,500 to £2,000.

The further commitments for the future might be summed up as follows; -The equipment of the hall would cost in the neighbourhood of £250. To complete the loggia fronting the recreation ground was estimated to cost £600. They hoped to build two more cottages on ground which they had to spare at a cost of about £1,000 and also to put up an officer's house for about £800. That was a fairly formidable programme. Nevertheless, they had past experiences to draw upon, and if they were spared they would pursue their way in absolute

confidence. Lady Barrington, whose energy in this cause was abounding, would see this undertaking through, and he appealed to all to give her their wholehearted support. In this connection he could say in Tennyson's words: "Kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood."

He now had the honour of asking Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice to declare the hall open.

Her Royal Highness said, *"I am sure that we all must feel that Lady Barrington's undertaking is most benevolent and patriotic, and I have the greatest pleasure in declaring this hall open."*

Lord Barrington, in proposing a vote of thanks to Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice, said that like the rest of the Royal Family she was always willing, at any inconvenience to herself, to forward any good work.

Sir Frederick Milner seconded and in alluding to Lady Barrington's scheme said that if the millions of money which had been spent in erecting some of the war memorials, which were of no use to anyone, had been spent in providing homes such as those at Shrivenham much more good would have been done.

As Her Royal Highness left the hall the Band played the National Anthem.

The guests were afterwards entertained to luncheon at Beckett House by Lord and Lady Barrington. The Princess motored to Swindon and proceeded by express train to Paddington.

In the afternoon a cricket match was played on the recreation ground by Shrivenham Club and a team representing the Swindon G.W.R. Social and Educational Union and was witnessed by Lord and Lady Barrington and many of the guests. The Hussars Band played selections of music. Tea was provided in a large marquee.