

ENGLAND'S HOSPITABLE HOMES

Havens Of Rest For New Zealand Soldiers In 1914-1918

By O. A. Gillespie

LORD BLEDISLOE'S offer of his country house, "Lydney Park," as a hospital or convalescent home for New Zealand soldiers recalls the nation-wide hospitality of the English people during the last war. New Zealanders were the "spoiled children" of the overseas forces and were accepted into the homes of all classes as friends of long standing. Many of the friendships still endure.

Not only did the owners of large country houses open their doors to our officers and men. In almost every village throughout the British Isles, for the duration of the war, men of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force found friends with whom they spent their leave.

The late Earl of Strathmore, father of Queen Elizabeth, kept open house at Glamis Castle, and the Queen herself, then Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, helped to entertain many New Zealanders who were her father's guests.

Avon Tyrrell

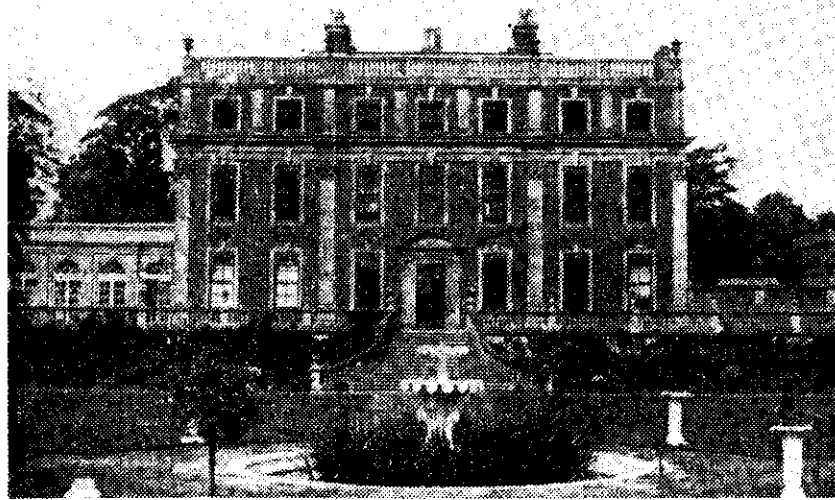
Perhaps the best known country house in England, as far as New Zealanders were concerned, was "Avon Tyrrell," the Hampshire home of the late Lord Manners, a brother of the Duke of Rutland. This beautiful house, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, was on the outskirts of the New Forest, a few miles from the tiny village of Ringwood on one side and the town of Christchurch on the other. One of England's three Avon Rivers ran through the property, which extended for some miles over farmland, moor and wood.

Brockenhurst, where one of New Zealand's hospitals was situated, was some miles away through the leafy lanes of the New Forest. As soon as the hospital was established, Lord Manners offered "Avon Tyrrell" to the New Zealand Government as a subsidiary hospital and convalescent home for officers. Throughout the years of the war hundreds of our men regained their health here, and a record book, kept by the matron, the Hon. Angela Manners, is still one of her most treasured possessions. Our soldiers knew her as Sister Angela. She afterwards married Colonel Hore Ruthven and lived for some years in South Africa when her husband was Secretary to the Governor-General.

Life at "Avon Tyrrell," typical of so many other houses, was entirely without formality, except for the necessary hospital routine. Lord and Lady Manners retained a few small rooms for their own private use, but the rest of the house was given over entirely to the patients. All sorts of trips and excursions were arranged by the family and their friends. Winchester, Bournemouth, Southampton, and the villages on the South Coast were within easy distance. Sometimes the patients were gathering bracken in the forest, as most of the men from the estate were on service. During the shooting season those who wished went out with Lord Manners after duck and pheasant, and hunting wild ponies in the forest was an adventure which appealed to some of us. There was an indoor tennis court near the house for use during the winter; tennis, croquet, and swimming filled in the summer days. At Christmas time we wrote and acted an astonishing pantomime.

Morning Tea Introduced

Like most New Zealanders in England, we introduced the morning tea habit to "Avon Tyrrell," and when the hospital closed down the family were quite convinced that it was an innovation which had come to stay. I have a feeling that, when the New Zealanders left, the house needed refurnishing and repairing. There was a very fine oak staircase leading from the spacious hall to the first floor, and on one not-so-memorable occasion some of the guests decided that, with the aid of trays, this would make an excellent toboggan run. It did—while the trays lasted—but the oak staircase suffered considerably.



"VEN," the beautiful home of Captain and Mrs. Savile, on the Dorset-Somerset border, will be remembered by many New Zealanders who fought in the Great War

Two of the V.A.D.'s at "Avon Tyrrell" were the Hon. Monica Grenfell, Lord Desborough's daughter, and Lady Moira Osborne, daughter of the Duke of Leeds. Sister Monica afterwards married Sir John Salmond, Marshal of the Royal Air Force from 1925 to 1929, who came to New Zealand in 1928 to report on air development here. She published her war memoirs under the title "Bright Armour," and has since written many short stories for English magazines. Sister Moira married Captain Oliver Lyttelton and they came on a trip to New Zealand in 1930.

Lord and Lady Desborough often entertained parties of New Zealanders at their country home, "Taplow Court," a fine old house standing in wooded grounds which ran down to the River Thames at Taplow. Lord Desborough, whose two sons were killed in the war, was a great sportsman. He twice swam Niagara, and on one famous occasion he stroked an eight which rowed across the English Channel.

Anglo-American Hospitality

Mr. and Mrs. H. Knight, two patriotic Anglo-Americans, gave their home in Lewis Crescent, Brighton, as another convalescent home for men of this Dominion. It was handed over just as the family left it and was filled with much beautiful rosewood and mahogany furniture, of considerable value. I'm afraid the average New Zealander cared little for æsthetic values. Cigarette butts had eaten many a hole into the rosewood piano in the drawing-room

before our people left. Brighton is one of England's best known seaside resorts, within easy reach of London and within walking distance of Rottingdean, Rudyard's Kipling's home, and Arundel Castle, seat of the Dukes of Norfolk, which was often visited by New Zealanders.

Visits to Bulwer Lytton's Home

Sir Evelyn and Lady de la Rue were never without a party of overseas men as their guests at "Lockleys," near Welwyn, which has since become a garden suburb of London. For years they entertained New Zealanders, South Africans, Australians, and Canadians, arranging trips and parties and other entertainment. "Knebworth," Bulwer Lytton's former home and seat of the present Lord Lytton, was nearby, and parties were always taken over by the de la Rues to see the famous library (just as Bulwer Lytton left it), the Romney portraits and the oak wainscoting, some of the finest in England. Nell Gwynn's old moated home, given to her by Charles II., was another favourite jaunt from "Lockley's."

Petrol Restrictions

"Ven," the beautiful home of Captain and Mrs. Savile, on the Dorset-Somerset border, was the temporary home of many overseas soldiers and a haven of peace from the trenches and military life. The nearest railway station was many miles away and the only transport consisted of a horse carriage, this because of petrol restrictions and Captain Savile's insistence that petrol was needed more in France than in England. Corfe Castle; Sherborn Abbey, burial place of one of the early English kings; Wareham, where King Alfred fought his first sea battle; and the Elizabethan home of the Digby family, were places of interest for guests at "Ven," but its greatest charm was the peace of the undulating, wooded countryside, of the quality so familiar in "Lorna Doone."

Two personalities who became known to thousands of overseas soldiers were the Countess of Harrowby and her daughter, Lady Frances Ryder. They set up an organisation which arranged to send soldiers from the Dominions to all parts of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, to stay with their relatives and friends and others who were willing to entertain men from the various forces. Fishing and shooting parties and motoring tours were also arranged for any part of the British Isles.

Mrs. Bruce MacKenzie, wife of the Auckland doctor, helped to entertain many of the men from Walton-on-Thames, another of the New Zealand hospitals. Her mother, Mrs. Nicholls, kept open house at her home in Bideford, Devonshire, and introduced many of our men to the beauties of Westward Ho and Clovelly.

Thousands will remember still the never-ending supply of theatre tickets issued by Miss Rosemary Rees, the New Zealand writer, and Miss Lena Ashwell's fine work in providing concert parties.

I write of the homes that I saw. In most cases the owners were rich people who had much to offer. But I have many reasons for knowing that hospitality was not confined to the wealthy, but was extended everywhere to the limits of each householder's resources.