



THE OPENING OF TENTERDEN AND DISTRICT DAY CENTRE (LATER HUB) IN 1980

In the 1970s Tenterden had a large number of elderly people. Roughly one in five was over 65 and one in ten over 75. Fortunately, Tenterden had West View Hospital, but there were no outpatient services and no Day Centre nearer than Ashford, so a great burden fell on the community and on the families and friends of those who could no longer help themselves. Tenterden also had a large number of disabled people. Nearly a hundred used to go to the Disabled Club in St Michaels' Hall and it was believed that many more, particularly the young ones, stayed away because the Club had grown too big and could not meet their needs.

In 1977 the local branches of Age Concern and the Kent Association for the Disabled (KAD) each decided that the best way to meet the needs of their own groups was to start a Day Centre. To have two in Tenterden was not practical so a joint management committee was formed to build a Day Centre that would meet the needs of both groups. The venture remained a joint effort throughout, the first of its kind in the County and the first Day Centre in which the KAD had been directly involved.

Several sites and buildings were considered but the obvious choice, because of its central position was the old National School. Built in 1843 on land belonging to the Pomfret family, the school was in use until 1973, when the new Church of England Primary (Infants) School was built next to the Church of England Primary (Junior) School in Recreation Ground Road. The building was empty and starting to deteriorate until it was under the threat of demolition. It was bought by Ashford Borough Council who leased it to the management committee at a peppercorn rent. The conversion began in 1979, leaving the outside of the building virtually unaltered while completely rebuilding the inside to provide all the facilities required.

Apart from the hall and offices, other rooms contained the laundry, kitchen, bathroom, shop, library and quiet room, specialised lavatories for the disabled, a counselling and sick room and a room for hairdressing and feet care. The ambulance entrance with its special wheelchair stair lift was at the back of the building.

The initial cost of the Centre was £70,000 for the conversion of the old school and £10,000 for equipment, of which the Kent County Council contributed £35,000 in all. The rest of the money had been found from public subscription and the fact that the money had already been raised shows a measure of the support that the Centre had received. With the completion of Stage 1 of the 2-Stage project, the official opening of the Day Centre was carried out by The Countess Mountbatten of Burma on Wednesday 18 June 1980. Much to the delight of all welcoming her she arrived driving her own car and appeared fully recovered from the terrible injuries she received from the bomb blast that killed



Countess Mountbatten addressing the gathering.
On her left is Dr A R Crawford

Lord Louis Mountbatten, her father, in County Sligo nearly a year previously. For nine months Countess Mountbatten was unable to walk without the aid of crutches and she told the gathering that now, more than ever, she understood the problems of the disabled.

Countess Mountbatten said: "The Day Centre needs continued support from local volunteers and also financial support from local industry and the community. For the latter point I have agreed to be Patron of The Tenterden and District Day Centre Appeal which starts today to find another £66,000 to complete Stage 2 (the conversion of the smaller annexe building) of the project. I urge local companies and the community to contribute generously to this most worthwhile cause. Looking forward to 1981, the International Year of the Disabled Person, let's make this Day Centre a shining example of what can be done by the community." Countess Mountbatten then unveiled a commemorative plaque.

Earlier, the chairman of the centre's management committee, Dr A R Crawford, welcomed the guests whom included the Mayors of Tenterden and Ashford and the Bishop of Maidstone. The Bishop of Maidstone, The Right Reverend Richard Third, conducted a service of dedication. After a vote of thanks by Dr T H E Taylor-Jones an informal tea was served in the Glebe Hall.

Stage 2 of the Project – the Annexe Building

Seven years to the day (18 June 1987) since she opened Tenterden Day Centre, Countess Mountbatten of Burma returned on its birthday to unveil a plaque in the new £150,000 Annexe. Paying tribute to more than 100 volunteers, Lady Mountbatten looked back to her last visit when she was still somewhat disabled after the IRA bomb outrage against her family. She was seriously injured and said: "that she had returned thankfully to active life after spending some time in a wheelchair and walking with the aid of sticks. Further, it makes one more aware of what is being done here." Lady Mountbatten also said that she wished to echo the prayer of dedication



(L to R): Countess Mountbatten of Burma, Dr A R Crawford, Rev Patrick Evans, Mr D Weatherall (Mayor of Ashford), Mrs Weatherall, Mr R Everett (Mayor of Tenterden), Mrs Everett

given by the Rev Patrick Evans, vicar of Tenterden. "A place such as this is really a cause for a great deal of thanksgiving." She spoke of her enormous admiration for appeal chairman Dr Raymond Crawford as project leader. He, in turn, thanked all those who had donated. The Friends of the Day Centre had been inaugurated and they were holding their first meeting on the following Monday.

The new annexe featured a pop-in snack bar and sun terraces as well as rooms for crafts and games. The thoroughly modern airy and spacious design by architect Anthony Teale allows for easy access by wheelchair. There is a bathroom with a contoured Parker Bath which enables the elderly and disabled to take a dip in comfort and safety. Many will be able to bathe independently, but more volunteers are needed for the rota for those needing assistance. Extra help is also needed for the pop-in which is especially attractive to members from the villages who visit the town. Secretary and organiser Carol Beeby said: "Many may find they have a long wait for a bus. We want to encourage them to come in and have a snack with us. The idea is for pensioners simply to pop in."

References

The Brochure for the Opening in 1980; Kent & Sussex Courier; Kentish Express

Jack Gillett