

Colinton stories – the history of Davidson House Care Home

The history of Davidson House Care Home on Colinton Road.

The Salvation Army's Davidson House Care Home on Colinton Road, opposite Dreghorn Cavalry Barracks, came into being in 1950 as "Davidson House for old folks" under the National Assistance Act. That however was only another chapter in its use as a home for old soldiers, which opened at the beginning of the first World War.

In 1899 a lady from Banchory, Miss W S Davidson, was in Glasgow seeing off The Royal Scots Greys who were heading to Africa. In response to a request from their Commanding Officer she vowed that "wherever and whenever Barracks were erected for the Scottish Cavalry I would endeavour to build a Soldiers' Home for them".

In 1908 after already having had a Home built near Maryhill Barracks in Glasgow and one in the planning stage at Barry Buddon near Carnoustie (opened in 1910) she turned her attention to Colinton.

Although the Cavalry Barracks were not yet completed she found land opposite from Col. Trotter of Colinton House, where she planned to build a Soldiers Home. Miss Davidson was a very determined lady and demonstrating this we have in our archives a letter which she sent to the head of the Colinton Tramway Company, who were building a line to carry the stones to be used to build the Barracks.

Their line was going to skirt her property to the west, involving the removal of a belt of tall trees. In her letter she asked them "could you please change your route to avoid having to remove the belt of trees, as they will give us privacy and shelter for our Home to the west "... and this they did! By 1912 her plans were in place and thanks to Provost Balfour's support contributions rolled in, in sufficient quantities to allow the building works to start; tenders were sought and one of £15000 was settled on ... But then WAR broke out !

By this time the Barracks were still unfinished, no heating system, no recreational facilities and the stables were being used for sleeping accommodation, so a call went out to Miss Davidson, who was still the Superintendent at the Maryhill Home in Glasgow "For God's sake can you please help!" Whilst being totally unprepared she rose to the occasion and within three days she raised £700 from friends which enabled her to plan a temporary Home. The Lord Provost agreed that she could have several "Flag Days" allowing her to raise more funds. Work on the Home then started.

The only building on her Feu was Oriel Cottage, which was extended to the rear and westwards towards Colinton to form the temporary Home. The sleeping accommodation only allowed for the three permanent staff to stay, whereas the invaluable five volunteer ladies had to travel over a mile every day to get there, which they did for the next six years!

The building was completed in double quick time and opened by Christmas 1914. Very quickly it was attracting huge numbers of troops, up to 1000 each night !so much so that it had two further extensions during the next three years. The three very large main rooms were a Temperence Dining room, a Recreation Room and a Reading Room. These facilities gave the troops a great "out of Barracks" venue to meet, chat, read and play games in a more relaxed and casual atmosphere. Every Sunday at 3.30 there was a Bible Class followed by tea and cakes (for

which everyone paid 6d) and at 7pm there was a short service, both of which were very well attended. Its founder Miss Davidson, who had been made an Honorary Serving-Sister of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem ran the Temperance Home.

After the Armistice in 1918 new quotes were sought to build the permanent Home, which off course was going to be far more expensive and in order to keep these costs as low as possible Miss Davidson did much of the planning herself. She engaged Messrs Cowiesons of Glasgow, whom she had previously employed at both Maryhill and Barry Buddon, for a price of £43,000.

The first sod was cut on the 6th August 1919 and the new Soldiers' Home was opened on the 26th May 1920 by the Duke of Atholl, the Lord High Commissioner.

As a result of the Great War, immediately after the Home opened many old soldiers became residents and to everyone's delight HM King George V and Queen Mary together with Princess Mary visited the Home on 9th July 1920. Following on from the visit His Majesty granted the Home permission to use the prefix "Royal", making it THE ROYAL SOLDIERS HOME, the first time that this had been granted to any Soldiers Home.

In 1923 after running the Home for nine years, due to family reasons in Banchory, Miss Davidson retired, leaving her close friend and long time assistant Mrs Ellis to continue the good work. In the ensuing years, although continuing to be an invaluable facility for troops stationed at Redford, due to the Great War, the Home was now taking in more residents.

As a result of there being far fewer troops stationed at Redford the attendance during evenings or weekends dropped dramatically, averaging only around 50 per day by 1935. The emphasis now being more on helping to rehabilitate old soldiers put increased pressure on the Home's finances, however the Salvation Army came to the rescue and in 1937 they

took over the running of the Home, by which time it had been greatly extended.

Although she had fulfilled the promise that she made to the Royal Scots Greys in 1899 Miss Davidson continued to take a great interest in the Home through her regular contact with Mrs Ellis. She died peacefully at her home in Banchory on the 20th December 1937.

The final chapter in the Home that we see today was in 1950, when Edinburgh Welfare Committee approved the registration under the National Assistance Act of Davidson House for old folks, which is now a care home housing 40 residents.

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