



Roderick Chamberlain, Chairman of Enham Alamein

Your Excellency, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen: thank you most warmly for your hospitality and friendly welcome this evening. Unless you know about Enham Alamein already, or have Googled us out of curiosity, my appearance on the list of runners and riders this evening must have looked a bit of a mystery.

I am here for a single, simple purpose: to commemorate, through a public thank you, an act of quite breath-taking generosity and friendship from one nation to another, in this case by the people of Egypt to the people of Britain. Please note that this is not about governments or politicians, but about ordinary people – and, in this 50th anniversary of Suez, it is a real pleasure to take you back another ten years, to 1945 in fact, for a good-news story.

But first I need to give you some context.

Enham Alamein is a village just outside Andover in North Hampshire, by a delicious coincidence not ten minutes drive from Vernham Dean where your Chairman makes her home. It is also the centre of operations of a charity, now simply named Enham, whose origins go back to the end of the First World War.

Enham began in 1918, with the moral and financial support of King George V and Queen Mary, with the purchase of a 1,000 acre estate in the village which was adapted to house, train and employ soldiers returning disabled from the Great War and seeking independence and choice in their lives. We pursued this mission through the fluctuations of the 1920s and 30s and, since there weren't many wars in those decades for servicemen to return from disabled, we were predominantly civilian by the Second World War, and much of the land had been sold off in the hard times. By 1945 we were full of plans but empty of cash.

So to my story.

In November 1945, the people of Egypt had what one can only term a whip-round – two public subscriptions, in fact - to say thank you to the people of Britain for ridding their country of the Axis forces. A minor

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part went to build a new UN Forces Sports Club in Gezira; most was donated for the care of disabled servicemen, and was given to Enham.

The sum involved was, in today's money, no less than six million pounds – and I remind you again that that was a voluntary gift from the ordinary people of Egypt to us in Britain.

Naturally this transformed our situation in Enham. It gave rise to a five year building programme and a huge leap forward in our medical resources. To demonstrate our gratitude the village changed its name to Enham Alamein, which it remains to this day.

Today, as both a charity and a Housing Association, we run three care homes, 250 supported living units, and four occupational therapy workshops for their residents; we still run three supported industries employing 70 clients so disabled as to be unlikely to find work in the open market. Separately we train and support some 1,500 disabled people off Incapacity Benefit and back to work each year, particularly into self-employment. We have recently founded and remain majority shareholders in three businesses financing and insuring disability equipment; and we still own most of the village.

Everything that we do remains true to the 1918 mission, and is wholly focussed on giving disabled people the best possible training and the greatest possible opportunities for independence in their lives.

It would be foolish to suggest that all this is funded by the Egyptian gift; indeed it would be an overstatement to say that the gift kept us alive. But it quite literally transformed the landscape in Enham Alamein; it gave us courage to put our ambitions into action; and it gave us durability of purpose. I am immensely grateful to His Excellency for inviting me to share this tale with you this evening: thank you again for your time and attention.

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