

Herts and Essex Observer

Friday 10th December 1920

A large company assembled at the recently completed Harlow War Memorial Institute and Harlow, Latton and Netteswell Women's Institute on the occasion of its opening by Mr and Mrs J. Swire on Wednesday.

The Institute is situated near the Victoria Hall in a central position on the site of the housing scheme.

Erected by Mr W. Winch, it is a handsome building constructed of breeze block, concrete, plastered grey outside and with a strong light roof of asbestos slates and heated and lighted throughout by gas.

The men's portion has reading and smoking rooms, a canteen, the usual offices and a billiard room measuring 30ft by 24ft, in which is a full sized billiard table presented by a few friends in memory of the late Lieut-Col J.N. Marshall V.C. and bearing a brass plaque to that effect. On the wall above the table is a framed photo of Col Marshall surmounted by a laurel wreath and the Union Jack.

Next to the canteen is a gymnasium, the gift of Mr Swire in memory of the men of Harlow who made the supreme sacrifice, and in particular of his son and of the regiments with which he served.

Divided from this by a moveable partition is the Women's Institute Club room, attached to which is a large ante-room fitted with a sink and cupboards etc.

By removing the partition, the gymnasium and Women's Institute Club room form a large hall, 72ft by 24ft, eminently suitable for concerts and similar functions.

The cost of the Memorial Club was £1,300, most of which has already been raised by public subscription, including the surplus from the War Memorial Fund. The Women's Institute cost £500, more than £300 of which has been obtained by various gatherings organised by the members over the last 18 months. Furniture, books and gymnastic apparatus have been given by various residents and the whole of the rooms present a most comfortable appearance.

The main hall was decorated with flags, evergreens and flowers and as the visitors took their seats, Mrs Coulson gave a selection on the piano.

The Chair was taken by Mr J. Balfour, supported by Mr and Mrs Swire, Mrs N. Gilbey, Mrs H.M. Bourke, the Rev L.J. Wilkinson and Mr F.C. Edwards. Having opened the proceedings with a short speech, the Chairman called on Mrs Gilbey who said that it was both an honour and a pleasure to take part in such an important event and was sure it was also a great day for the members of the Women's Institute, who now saw their dreams of a club room taking material form (applause).

Explaining the organisation of the Women's Institute Movement, she said it was first started in Canada by Mrs Watts who came to England and opened the first Women's Institute here in 1915. There were now 1708 branches in England and Wales with a membership far exceeding 100,000. In Essex there were 102 and of these Harlow came 3rd as regard membership (applause). The idea of these Institutes was to improve rural life in every possible way, and they were essentially non-party and non-sectarian, the spirit in which they were run being that of kindness and goodwill (applause). Industries such as rusk work, slipper making etc. were encouraged and already in a flourishing condition. In conclusion, she thanked Mr and Mrs Swire and Mrs Phillips for all they had done.

Amid great applause, Mrs Swire rose and said that she wished the Institute every success and if they all worked for the common good, she was sure they would never regret this undertaking. She then declared the hall open.

The Chairman, in a humorous and anecdoted speech, emphasised the necessity of combination “by all sorts and conditions of men and women for the betterment of the whole” saying this was the surest method of combating Bolshevist influences.

He explained how this building would cater for the needs of everyone and should form a splendid meeting place for the 272 ex-servicemen of the town. As Chairman of the Finance Committee, he added that the financial outlook was quite bright thanks to the generosity and enthusiasm of Mr Swire. Mr Swire said that his wife and himself fully appreciated the honour of opening the building. He dwelt on the various activities which would go on under its roof. He thanked Mr Winch for keeping down expenses, Mr Webber for his indefatigable work and all the many others who had actively interested themselves in the scheme.

In conclusion, he joined with Mrs Swire and declared the hall open. The Chairman then appealed for all men present to enrol as members of the War Memorial Club.

Mrs H.M. Bourke proposed a vote of thanks to Mrs N. Gilbey and Mrs Swire. This was seconded by Mr F.C Edwards, who linked with it the name of Mr Swire, was supported by the Rev L.J Wilkinson and carried with applause.

Tea was then served by a committee of ladies and the building was inspected, satisfaction being expressed on all hands at the convenience and comfort it affords.

An entertainment was then given, the well-arranged and varied programme being greatly appreciated by a large audience, many of whom were ex-servicemen. All the artistes were well received, Mr Bob Oakley made a great hit with his humorous items and Mr J. Riches was heard to advantage as were songs by Mrs Fisher, Mrs Wilkinson and Mr J. Harris, recitations by Mr S. Bates and violin solos by Miss W. Barnes and duologue by Mrs F.P Yates and Mrs Fisher. A piano duet was given by Mrs Edwards and Mrs Ward.

In the interval, speeches welcoming the ex-servicemen and wishing their club every success were made by Mr J. Balfour and Mr Swire, the latter concluding by declaring the Harlow Memorial Club open. Mr J. Burns, in reply, expressed their thanks and appreciation of all that had been done. “Everyone must take part in developing the Institute so that it might worthily fulfil the purpose for which it was erected”.

In concluding, he thanked everyone who had helped towards the scheme of which that building was the result. On the proposition of Mr F.C. Edwards, seconded by Rev F.P. Yates, Mr Swire was accorded a hearty vote of thanks.

After the concert, the room was cleared for dancing, for which Mr W. Fulker was M.C.

Collections for the Institute fund raised £6 including money taken at the two side shows in the charge of Mr Francis and Mr Bates.

The arrangements for the whole proceeding were in the hands of a committee comprising Mrs Bambridge, Mrs Cattell, Mrs Fisher and Messes Phillips, Beard and Webber (hon sec), who are to be congratulated for the successful manner in which everything was carried through.

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