

WELFARE INSTITUTE
Miner's £20,000 Scheme at Blyth
IMPOSING BUILDING

The Cowpen and Crofton Miners' Welfare Institute in Renwick Road, Blyth, is to be opened on Race Wednesday afternoon.

The building is of red Pelaw pressed brick with Heworth stone facings, and is 80 feet long by 58 feet deep, with a frontage on Renwick Road of 264 feet, on Rosebery Avenue of 180 feet, and on Herbert Avenue, 300 feet. The area of the site is 6,870 square yards. There is to be a 50 feet shrubbery along Renwick Road, a bowling green 140 feet square on the south end of the site, a tennis court 100 feet by 45 feet on the north end, a site on the west side for a gymnasium and quoit ground 80 feet by 30 feet, and a site 60 feet by 40 feet in the north west corner facing Rosebery Avenue for a caretaker's house.

Part one of the scheme is now completed, consisting of the Welfare Hall and the fencing and draining of the site. Part two, to complete the scheme, namely, the building of the caretaker's house and the laying out of the grounds, will proceed after the hall is opened.

The hall is to be opened by Mr Robert Smillie, M.P., and separate rooms will be declared open by other distinguished gentlemen.

MARBLE STAIRCASE

The institute consists on the ground floor of a splendidly tiled entrance lobby and lounge with Terrazzo floors and a 6 feet marble staircase leading to the upper floor, the lounge being 38 feet by 10 feet. From this one enters the billiard room 38 feet by 31½ feet by 18½ feet, complete with sectional bookcases in oak.

At the rear of the lounge a door leads to the gentlemen's lavatories and caretaker's room, and out to the back of the building is a boiler cellar, 23 feet by 136 feet, containing the heating and domestic supply boilers.

Proceeding to the upper floor, on the left of the landing is a ladies' ante room, 20½ feet by 13½ feet, and off this is a ladies' bathroom, 11½ feet by 10 feet with a lavatory. On the right side of the landing is a gentlemen's ante room, 19 feet by 13½ feet, and of this is a 14½ feet by 9½ feet gentlemen's bath room with spray bath and lavatory.

The public hall is entered through two ornamental oak doors. This hall is 60 feet by 38 feet, and is capable of seating with chairs, 500 people. It has an Austrian oak block floor in pleasing design, a panelled ceiling, and oak panelled dado. The platform is 31 feet by 16 feet, with two dressing rooms each 10 feet by 7 feet at the rear. The whole building is of fireproof construction the lower floors being of Armadek in two colours and terrazzo, and the upper floors of holocast beams with indented bar reinforcement. The wall of all the lavatories and dados of the main corridors are tiled in pleasing designs and leaded glazing in colour design is employed throughout. The building is centrally heated with separate domestic boilers for baths and service. The lighting is by electricity.

The construction is strong and pleasing. The estimated cost of the whole scheme on completion will be £20,000, part of which is borne by the National Miners' Welfare Organisation and part locally.

THE CONTRACTORS

The contractors responsible for the building and appurtenances are:- General contractor, Mr George Towers, Blyth. Specialised work, outside general contract – Steel sashes, Messrs Fred Braby and Co., Glasgow. Roof trusses and steel work, Messrs Redpath, Brown and Co., Newcastle; reinforced concrete, Messrs The Indented Bar and Concrete Engineering Co., Ltd., London, per Messrs Durham and Vevers, East Boldon; wall tiling, mosaic, Armadek, jointless and block flooring, Messrs the Art Pavements and Decoration, Ltd., London; art glazing, Messrs Reed Millican and Co., Newcastle; drains and fencing, Messrs Jas. McLaren, Ltd., Newcastle; heating and domestic services, Messrs Thos. Poulter and Son, Blyth; electric lighting, Messrs Robson and Coleman, Haymarket, Newcastle; fuses and switch gear, Messrs the Arctic Fuse and Electrical Manufacturing Co., Birtley; baths and sanitary fittings, Messrs

Chas. Winn and Co., Birmingham; art metal work and palisading, Messrs Baylis, Jones and Baylis Ltd., Wolverhampton; stone work, Messrs W. H. Endean and Son, Blyth; furnishing Messrs The Co-operative Wholesale Society, Ltd., Newcastle.

The architect and engineer responsible for the design and supervision of erection is Mr John T. Pringle, of Messrs The Cowpen Coal Company Limited, Blyth. The president of the Welfare Committee is Mr Jas. R. Ferrell, the treasurer, Mr Wm. Ducker, and secretaries, Mr George Forrest and Mr Wm. Wyllis, supported by representatives from each section of the 2,000 workers at the Cowpen Coal Company's Crofton and Cowpen, and Isabella Collieries. The caretaker is Mr George Mordue, of Newsham.

Blyth News & Ashington Post, Thursday 17 June, 1926.

**WELFARE HALL.
Opening Ceremony at Blyth.
WORTHY OBJECTS.**

It is no exaggeration to describe the Welfare Hall and Institute of the Cowpen and Crofton Collieries, Blyth, which was opened yesterday, as not only the most up-to-date of its kind in the county, but one which will have few superiors in the country.

There was a very large attendance at the opening ceremony which was preceded by a procession from the Market Place headed by the banners of the lodges and the collieries band. The outer gate to the grounds was opened in the name of Robert Smillie, M.P., by Mr R. G. A. Tacey, Blyth, and Mr Tacey also opened the main door of the building on behalf of Mr Smillie, while inside in his own name he performed a similar office at the billiard room.

In officially opening the library Mr J. H. Ferrell, the chairman of the committee, said he believed that was the best room in the building, and it was intended to make it very useful to the Cowpen and Crofton miners, and one of the places where they would get a large amount of technical knowledge in relation to their occupation.

EDUCATIONAL WORK

"I hope it will lead to many happy days," was the wish of Mrs Emmerson in cutting the white ribbon which guarded the foot of the commanding staircase leading to the upper part of the building, and on arriving at the main hall Mr George Emmerson, manager of the Cowpen and Crofton collieries, said he felt honoured that day in being asked by the committee of the welfare scheme to open the lecture hall of the building. His desire and wish was that it might prove very useful in adding considerably to the educational knowledge of the members, while it would also provide them with facilities for music and recreation.

After the committee and visitors had taken their places on the platform a dedicatory prayer was offered up by the Rev. C. F. Medd, vicar of St. Mary's, following which Mr J. R. Ferrell, who presided, read letters of apology from Mr Smillie, detained in London on Parliamentary duties; the Mayor and Town Clerk of Blyth, Mr E. Emley, Lieut-Col. J. H. Nicholson, and Mr W. Straker, joint secretary of the general welfare committee.

"I promised at the laying of the foundation stone that when the hall was opened you would not be disappointed, and I feel today you will not be; it is a credit to the architect and the builder," said the chairman, amid loud applause, at the opening of his remarks. A few of them at Cowpen Colliery had had the ambition to see that sort of thing realised for a great number of years, and they got their opportunity owing to the origin of the Welfare Fund through which the Cowpen Collieries received a large donation. They hoped before very long to have the hall paid off. The welfare committee, proceeded Mr Ferrell, intended the hall to be used by the miners, their wives, sons and daughters, and the committee wanted them to associate with each other in that hall and rooms. They really wanted the boys and girl to understand that it was a miners' institute, and was the home for the miners' child, having been built for them, while he could promise that before long a cricket field would be provided.

PRESENTATION

Mr James Reilly, vice-chairman of the committee, moved a vote of thanks to those who had taken part in the ceremony and made presentations to Mr Tacey and Mr Emmerson as memories of the occasion. In presenting Mr Tacey with an ornamental gilt key Mr Reilly said the fact that the Cowpen and Crofton miners placed him next to "Bob" Smillie was, he could assure Mr Tacey, the highest respect they could pay him. For many years Mr Tacey had been known as the workers friend, and more particularly the miners friend, which he had demonstrated on more than one occasion.

Of Mr Ferrell Mr Reilly said he did not think it was possible for any man to have taken more interest in the welfare work than he had done, and if any man deserved any praise for the work it was their chairman Mr Ferrell. (Applause.)

Presenting a silver mounted walking stick to Mr Emmerson Mr Reilly said he had not had many opportunities of taking any active part in the work, but when he was asked Mr Emmerson always gave his assistance, both as an individual and as colliery manager.

One of the things he had heard asked about the welfare institute was: Is it going to be a success or a wash out? proceeded Mr Reilly. That, he said, rested with the people for whom it had been built; they would decide whether it was to be a success or a failure. The idea whereby the miners and their families could be brought together in that district for social, educational and recreative purposes originated in 1922. That day they presented to their people the building they had asked for. The committee had to be interested in the place for four years when there was not a brick to be interested in. The members were striving for an idea, and if it was possible for men to be interested in something for four years they could not see or touch it was possible for the people to be interested in the building which the committee handed over, saying in all sincerity, "It is yours to make or break." It would be to the credit or discredit of the people and not the committee, for the committee had acted up to the instructions it had received. There had been complaints that the place did not meet the requirements of the middle-aged and old men, but, said Mr Reilly, when any public body started to work for its own generation alone it would sink into oblivion. The only work worth doing was what was going to have a beneficial effect not only on their own time alone, but on those who came after them. This was the spirit which must prevail if success was to come, and he hoped it would prevail there. (Applause.)

SWIMMING BATH

Mr W. Wylie, secretary, seconded the vote of thanks, and said he had not yet seen a scheme to compare to theirs.

Mr Tacey, returning thanks congratulated the Cowpen and Crofton miners on the splendid building that had been placed at their disposal and that of their wives and families. He hoped they would individually and collectively work to make the institute and hall a huge success so that in the short time they might want an expansion of their place. There was one thing wanted in the town of Blyth which would provide an acquisition to that building. He referred to a swimming bath, and thought they had plenty of spare space to carry out that idea. He considered it one of the greatest honours of his life to be invited to open that hall and the present he received he would place alongside another he received some years ago from the Cowpen and Crofton miners and which he was always proud to show to his friends.

Mr Emmerson said he would look upon that day as one of the events of his life, and one he would never forget. He was very proud to be associated with anything connected with the miners and their wives, with whom he mixed every day, and he had no doubt that fine institute and the facilities it possessed would brighten their lives.

A vote of thanks to Mr J. T. Pringle, the architect, and Mr G. Towers, the builder, was proposed by Mr W. Johnson, and seconded by Mr W. Ducker, treasurer.

Mr Pringle presented Mr Tacey on behalf of Mr Smillie with a writing case, and mentioned that in the building they had replicas from such places as Armstrong college and York Minster. Mr Pringle spoke with appreciation he had received from the chairman, Mr Johnson

and Mr Ducker. He hoped that the building would be appreciated in the way it ought because in designing it the feeling which was prominent in his mind was to try and provide a building they would be ashamed to destroy. He hoped he had achieved his object.

Mr Towers handed over to Mr J. A. Lee on behalf of the trustees the deeds of the building and in response Mr Lee hoped that their people would take as much interest in the place as they did in their own homes. It was the most perfect scheme in the two counties, and he had visited fifteen. For beauty of design and utility of purpose it was second to none in the country. He believed the people of Blyth outside the miners were proud of the building. (Applause.)

Coun. J. Mordue voted a word of thanks to the central welfare committee, associating the names of Mr W. Straker and Colonel Nicholson with his remarks. They were living in an age which expected big developments, observed Coun. Mordue, and that institute and hall was one of the developments. It was five years ago since it was recognised that there should be something in the way of recreation for the workers and a bill was passed which allowed the miners to build such places. He expected governments of the future would carry on the good work and assist the producers in other industries to have the same opportunity for recreation and educational facilities as the welfare scheme afforded the Cowpen and Crofton miners, and enlighten the workers generally in this way.

Ald. A. Walton, associating himself with the proposal of Coun. Mordue, said he felt proud as a member of the Corporation that it had been left to the miners to erect the most beautiful building in the town. (Applause.) There had been a remarkable change in the feeling concerning the miners. A short time ago the miners were looked upon with a considerable amount of askance and doubted as a suitable personage to live on a town at all. He was rather glad that feeling had entirely changed, and now the miner was looked upon as being the main support of the people carrying on the work of the industries of the nation. To him such a movement as they were taking part in was rather an indication that the miners were determined to take a fuller share in the better things of life. (Applause.) It had been far too long in his mind the general impression that the miner must spend his working day in the dark and gloom of the mine, and that the social condition of any description were good enough for him. But, at last, there was an upward movement and he believed a movement such as that was going to have a tremendous amount of good and showing the young men and women that there was something more in life than the mere production of wealth; that they were social beings as well as workers, and that their social ambitions could only be realised in such institutions as that. (Applause.) He felt that any work put into that movement of the Cowpen and Crofton miners was not in vain.

Mr John Harrison, Ashington, political agent for Mr Smillie, also addressed the meeting, and said Mr Smillie was largely instrumental in bringing about the idea of the welfare scheme for the miners.

Mr J. R. Ferrell also received a present of a souvenir key.

The billiard tables were opened with games played between Messrs G. Emmerson and J. Parker and R. G. H. Tacey and J. Reilly.

A concert and social followed at night.

The name of Mr J. Finlay, Blyth, who was responsible for the painting and decorative work of the hall and institute was omitted from the list of sub-contractors given in the description of the building which appeared in last Thursday's issue.

Blyth News & Ashington Post, Thursday 24 June, 1926.