

Dear Editor

The Church Institute

Many people by now, may have noticed that the *For Sale* board has been removed from outside the Institute. The Institute had also appeared "For Sale" in the Abingdon Herald at a price in excess of £500,000. When enquiries were made of the Estate Agent about its removal, the answer given was that it had been withdrawn from the market by The Trustees. This was very confusing to say the least. We knew from recent meetings with the Trustees' that the anonymous benefactor, who had pledged a 6 figure sum towards the restoration of the Institute back in 2004, (see Abingdon Herald cuttings opposite) had, in fact, made an offer of the asking price. The Trust were fully aware that the benefactor had said that he had no intention of developing the site. He also said he would offer the Ex-Servicemen's Club a long lease on The Institute and Car Park, plus pledging financial support in restoring the property. The reason he gave for this very generous offer, was the fact that a hundred years or so ago, his family had close ties with the Anson family. He commented at one meeting between the Trustees and the Ex-Servicemen's Club, that he was sure that what the Ex-Servicemen's Club was trying to achieve were the wishes of the Anson sisters.

Since the news of the withdrawal, the anonymous benefactor has once again made his offer. Should the Trust accept it, it would secure the future of The Institute for the people of Marcham for many years to come.

As one can see from the newspaper cuttings of 1903/04, there is little doubt what Arthur Henry Anson wanted when he financed the scheme all those years ago.

MARCHAM EX-SERVICEMEN'S CLUB

Abingdon Herald 30 July 1904

Opening the Church Institute

The Church Institute, which has been generously provided for the parish by Mr. A. H. Anson, of Marcham Park, was formally opened by the Bishop of Reading after morning service on Sunday. A procession was formed, consisting of the clergy, the churchwardens, choir and congregation, and on the way from church to the institute the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" was sung. A short service was conducted in the Hall by the Bishop, who offered a dedicatory prayer, and the hymn, "Sons of Labour," was sung. There was a good attendance of parishioners.

The Institute is a large and very substantial building of brick and stone, having an

imposing elevation with a statue of St. Nicholas, and the frontage to North-street measures about 30 feet. A flight of steps leads to folding oak doors, which open into a vestibule, and on each side is a cloak-room. Beyond the vestibule is the central hall, a lofty and well-lighted apartment 60ft. by 26ft., with open roof and stained wood principals. The platform is 26ft. by 10ft., and there is a movable partition, by means of which the hall can be divided into a reading-room and billiard-room, over the latter being a sky-light, and when not in use the table can be placed beneath the platform. The building is laid with block floor, and will be heated by hot water. In the rear of the hall are hot and cold water baths and recreation rooms, and at the side, with a separate entrance from the street, is a gymnasium and skittle alley. The walls are coloured with duresco distemper of pale salmon and dado of Pompeian red, and the woodwork is painted white. In nearly all respects the Institute would meet the requirements of a much more populous parish, and it is hoped that the people of Marcham will show their appreciation of Mr. Anson's generosity by entering thoroughly and with a proper spirit into the various organisations which, no doubt, the parochial workers will shortly be arranging in connection with the Institute. The builder is Mr. G. H. Wheeler, of Abingdon, and the total cost is about £2,000. It may be mentioned that Mr. Anson has also done Marcham good service by erecting a number of substantial cottages.

The Bishop of Reading preached an appropriate sermon in the parish church at evensong.

On Tuesday evening an entertainment, well attended, was given in the new Institute under the direction of Miss Anson and Miss Renaud, the programme consisting of songs, glees, part-songs etc.

Abingdon Herald 8 April 2004

Big Anonymous gift to village hall work

An anonymous benefactor has donated a six-figure sum to help refurbish a village hall.

The donation will go towards the £200,000 bill for refurbishing the building at Marcham.

The village's Anson Trustees hope to start work on restoring the 100-year-old Anson Institute, in North Street, in September – the first phase of a wider scheme to improve village facilities.

The charity commission has given the trustees permission for the refurbishment of the institute, which is used by the Brownies, a toddlers group, a playgroup,

Aunt Sally team, the Marcham Society and the Village Café – where young and old people have a weekly free lunch.

The trustees have also been granted permission to form a company, allowing them to recruit more people to sit on the board of directors....

Anson trustee, Neil Rowe, said "After several years of debate, we are at last making progress. We are confident of getting planning permission for the homes development and hope to start work on the institute in September. We have been lucky to receive a very substantial six-figure donation towards the Institute refurbishment from an anonymous local person, for which we are extremely grateful. The trust will apply to various other sources for grant aid."

Abingdon Herald 3 September 2004

**Village pavilion bid takes step forward
Go-ahead for first phase of project**

An Oxfordshire village charity has taken another step forward in its plan to refurbish a community meeting place and build a new sports and community pavilion.

The Anson Trustees in Marcham near Abingdon have won planning permission to build six houses on the car park of the village's Institute – used as a village hall – and on land at the back of the property in North Street.

Money from the sale of the six, three-bedroom cottages will be ploughed into new facilities on the sports field....

MADNews January 2006

Dear Editor

Brian Gower should not have to worry about the appearance of a Village Hall near his bedroom window, we already have an excellent hall in North Street.

At the first and only meaningful public meeting on the subject, the overwhelming majority voted to retain and refurbish the beautiful Village Hall, such an integral part of the village.

A wealthy and generous benefactor has offered to finance the project, so I cannot comprehend why the work has not already been undertaken. Why is a minority group being allowed to defy the majority and pursue the destruction of this lovely old building.

Where are the people pledged to protect the interests of the people of Marcham?

Ed Vaizey, where are you?

Iain Brown, where are you?

Jane Hanna, where are you?

Parish Council, where are you?

Come on, let's be having you. Save this priceless jewel.
F W BUCKINGHAM

Write to MADNews and let others know what you think about current events