

History of the Public Shelter on The Walls, Mistley.



Manningtree Museum & Local History Group
October 2023.

The History of Public Shelter on The Walls in Mistley

In 1932 the local Member of Parliament, Stanley Holmes came to Mistley to open the new tidal swimming pool on The Walls, originally called the War Memorial Bathing Pool. This did not at first have huts for changing, but one at least was later provided just for the girls.

On the 14th May 1938 he was back to officially open a new road side 'Shelter' nearby, but the purpose for this was never intended as a second changing room, despite this being the use that was made of it by many a local schoolboy.

The first mention in the records for this initiative was in September 1937 when Mrs Bennett suggested that some form of shelter was needed for the convenience of members visiting the 'Institute' by bus. These being members of the local Mothers Union. Still in existence today this support organization, with links to the Church of England, was at one time the largest voluntary groups for women, now superseded by the Women's Institute. Queen Elizabeth II. was later a royal mother and patron.

The 'Institute' the mothers were attending was the hall nearby in New Road, built to improve the education and well-being of the local parishioners and given as a gift in 1911 by the locals in recognition of the 27 years of service by the Reverend Charles Fredrick Norman, whose family gave the land.

In March 1938 it was formally proposed at the Parish Council that a shelter be provided by the Mothers Union to be sited near the bathing pool. They then set about raising the funds for this. Mr Atfield Brooks ran one of the local maltings and raised some of this by showing his Coronation films, presumably that of King George VI in 1937. The rest came from public subscription, with one special donation given by the widow Clara Lovell in memory of her late husband Edward, who had been the chair of Mistley Parish Council for many years, having also worked as a manager in the local maltings. It was clearly a well-supported initiative which managed to raise all the money needed ready for the grand opening.





This was a large scale affair with the local M.P. brought in again to do the opening, with Atti Brooks presiding and Mr Tom Ingleton Mussellwhite an Ironmonger from the High Street, who was at that time chairman of the Parish Council.

Speeches to a large crowd were topped off by the Manningtree British Legion playing 'I do like to be beside the seaside'. The event was later reported in the Chelmsford Chronicle.

The Shelter was built as a wooden structure with a peg tile roof. It was divided into four lobbies, with seats and glass windows. The style was very much of the pre-war period.

There was originally a plaque on the southern side to commemorate the opening and Edward Lovell, put up by his wife and daughter called Edme, such was the association with the maltings.

It was not long before the lack of a second swimming pool hut for the boys emerged as a problem and on the 16th June 1939 the Parish Council in vain tried to prohibit children from using the Public Shelter as a changing room.

As a wooden structure it needed constant work for both maintenance and repair from malicious damage. Increasingly this fell to the Parish Council who recorded in 1951 that they had both the bathing pool hut and Shelter re-painted. It was still on their list of structures that needed repairs and re-painting in 1951, and ever since.

The glass in the windows survived the war but was removed in 1960 owing to damage incurred.



At some point the wooden bottom half of the structure was carefully taken out and replaced by brickwork. The original guttering was also taken off.

After the swimming pool and changing hut were removed, the shelter ended up on its own and less used by the Mothers Union, let alone as one of the local bus stops, due to the lack of nearby housing. It is though still a public facility used (and occasionally abused) by locals and visitors to sit and admire the views or shelter from the rain and occasionally the sun.

It continues to need maintenance and every few years a crop of names carved into the seats is removed. £900 was spent by the Council in 2012. The latest work was done during the summer of 2023 by the Rotary

Club of Manningtree Stour Valley.



Philip Cunningham: Manningtree Museum & Local History Group.

Images: Katherine Rose (Charles Pax Rose), Nigel Klammer and the Rotary Club of Manningtree Stour Valley. Newspaper report provided by Peter Carter.