

# Denman, the English Country Women's College

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**M**EEETING together in groups with other people whose interests are similar answers a basic human need, especially for those whose lives normally are lonely or isolated. Working together for a common objective is both stimulating and educational. Adult education, in its widest sense, covers all such activities. To be successful it must fit the needs of the people for whom it is intended; they should have a part in supplying it and not feel that it is merely something provided for them. Denman, the English Women's Institute College, is a convincing example of what such a project can achieve.

**W**OMEN'S Institutes in England in the past 30 years have made unique contributions to the welfare of country people. In addition to the local influence of each institute, the organisation soon gained sufficient status to influence national policy as it affected the rural community, either through official consultation or by deputations and representations to Ministers and officials.

With institutes in almost every village, the membership encompasses an immense fund of knowledge and experience. When an institute is asked, as happens frequently, for a report on some problem affecting country dwellers, the information is precise and detailed, giving facts which would be



difficult to obtain otherwise. Similarly, the national federation policy on such subjects as health, children's welfare, and country amenities is carried out through the activities of each local institute.

It is also acknowledged that, without the extensive programme of food production and conservation and local marketing carried on during the war and still continuing through the organisational framework of the institutes, the British food situation would have been much more serious.

The institutes have always been independent, organising their own programmes for meetings and training members as officers, organisers, and demonstrators. They have been responsible for a great revival of interest in traditional handicrafts and an increase in the numbers who practise them and for developing groups for the study and performance of music and drama. By means of produce shows, grading for marketing, organ-

ised courses, and the awarding of certificates to those who pass recognised tests, the standard of food production, preparation, and preservation has been raised and housewives have been made familiar with modern methods and equipment. Other activities extend from local social events to international contacts through the system of overseas "links," affiliation with the Associated Country Women of the World, and participation in programmes of assistance for war-devastated countries.

## Establishment of Denman College

A recent and most notable achievement of this organisation has been the establishment of Denman College, named after Lady Denman, for many years president of the movement. Denman is the country women's college, the result of their efforts and planned to meet their special needs. Though Oxford is only 9 miles away, the college is sufficiently remote to require the address "Marcham, near Abingdon."

It was opened in September, 1948. The stone Georgian house was modernised by previous owners just before the war, but after wartime requisition by the Royal Air Force a good deal of reconditioning work was necessary. Additional sleeping accommodation for 17 students has been arranged in "The Croft," converted from former stable buildings, so now 50 places are available for students.

Army huts left from the wartime occupation are to be turned into workshops and craft rooms, thus lessening the crowding of the main building, where space is ample for living and recreation but a little inadequate for classrooms. The farm land attached to the property totals about 200 acres, most of which is let. About 30 acres have been kept for use in carrying out and expanding instruction in gardening, the cultivation of small fruits, and the care of animals and poultry.

The unique quality of Denman as a result of the co-operative efforts of many people is practically illustrated in the furnishing of the bedrooms.



Country homes from which Women's Institutes draw their membership may be isolated and lonely.