

As this is the first time SA WI has given a report, I thought I'd provide a brief bit of background about the WI.

The Women's Institute movement began at a key time for women. In 1915 the war had begun to break down many social barriers and women were being forced to take a more active role in the community while the men were away in the armed services.

At the same time, the Women's suffrage movement had been making people, including women themselves, re-evaluate their position in society.

Many of the women involved in setting up the National Federation of WIs had been active in the women's suffrage movement and they saw in the WIs, a way of educating and encouraging women to take an active part in public life.

The WI was founded on democratic ideals over 100 years ago and this commitment to equality is still central to our ethos today. The WI is an inclusive, supportive and progressive organisation for all women with a diverse membership of over 190,000 members.

The National Federation is made up of many county Federations and Steeple Ashton WI belongs to the Wiltshire Federation whose Headquarters are in Devizes.

Steeple Ashton WI first began in 1916 and became part of the National Federation in 1919. During WWII, members were involved in a great deal of war work and so there was a break until it restarted in 1949 with Rosie Brett-Green's mum, Betty Smith, as Secretary and a Mrs Coleman as President. It has always been a thriving Institute with members meeting once a month in the then Committee Room in the old Village Hall on this site. It has continued uninterrupted to this day and we now have 45 members who meet on the second Wednesday of each month.

We currently have an active committee who plan meetings, speakers & events, organise outings and arrange help from our members for other organisations in the village when possible, usually being asked to make cakes and run cake stalls!

But the often quoted "Jam and Jerusalem" is an unfair perception of the WI. We are so much more than that. Each year, every WI in the country has a list of resolutions on which to vote to select one to take forward as a campaign for the following year.

Over 100 plus years, WI resolutions have included:

Housing (the 1st ever in 1918)

Women Police

Maternal health

Equal pay for Equal work

Keep Britain Tidy

Cervical Cancer screening

HIV & AIDS awareness

Mental Health

And more recently - Climate Change; Human trafficking; Plastic Pollution and our resolution for next year - ADHD & Autism in women.

Once a resolution has been voted for, the NFWI begin a year of information and campaigning with government and other organisations and have been responsible for instigating change on many important issues that affect women as well as the wider population.

In 2020, the pandemic saw Steeple Ashton WI committee working hard to ensure that our members were kept in touch, using newsletters, Meetings in a Bag, Quizzes, Easter & Christmas gifts on the doorstep and in early 2021 we even embraced meetings on Zoom!! No one was more surprised than us, but we try to be forward thinking and learnt to use the new technology so that we were able to have several virtual meetings with speakers until we could meet in person again. For those who could not use this technology, we kept in touch by delivering paper-based information to their doors.

Since the pandemic, we have held a Climate Change information morning on the village green, listened to speakers on such diverse subjects such as: Midwifery, Musical boxes, Female Hygiene in India & Young Lives with Cancer to name a few. Last November we held a vigil in the church in support of ending violence against women. Last summer we raised £200 on the cake stall at the village craft fair, (of which £100 went to support the Church clock restoration). We raised over £500 at our annual coffee morning in August in our Treasurer's garden and enjoyed a visit to Daylesford Farm Organic in Gloucestershire.

A visit to Kew Gardens is planned for this summer, our Lunch Club is thriving and we will celebrate Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee with an afternoon tea in the Village Hall. We also have an annual Bursary which aims to encourage education and the learning of new skills by enabling the member who wins to attend a workshop or course on any subject she chooses.

So as you can see, we don't spend all our time making Jam and singing Jerusalem!

Some of our members have been with us for over 40 years and have taken an active part in running our WI during that time. But our current President, Ann Hunt, and our committee, would like to encourage new members and younger ladies to come along and see what we do and it is always good to have new ideas. We are a friendly group and anyone, especially perhaps new ladies to the village, who would like to come along to find out a bit more about it, will find themselves made very welcome.

Marian Little  
Secretary  
Steeple Ashton WI