

Ontario Women's Institute members visit three women's institutes in England

Jeanetta Sager

Lumps came into the throats, as a bus load of forty-five Women's Institute members from the Waterloo area, when Peggy Knapp embraced Ivy Robinson at a cut-off near Endimoor School on the afternoon of April 20th. It was a friendship exemplified by two countries—Canada and England—meeting in an exchange visit for the first time in the history of the Women's Institute of Ontario.

How did it all come about?

One lovely afternoon in September, 1974, Ivy and Harry Robinson were saying farewell to Wally and Peggy Knapp after being entertained 'Knapp Fashion', for the day, when Ivy said, "Why don't you gather a few of your Institute friends together and come to England sometime soon?"

So it was on April 14th that forty-five members husbands and friends boarded a bus at Cambridge to start an exchange visit that shall never be forgotten by any who were fortunate to accept the invitation.

We had been driving along a freeway similar to the 401 in Ontario when electricity on the bus exploded with, "There's the Red Car" and there it was standing on the top of the overpass—our signal that this was the spot to turn off. The bus slowed down to stop to let a lovely young lady carrying a red handbag step onto the bus.

"A goodly thing it is to meet

In friendship circle bright"

A glow shone forth from Ivy's face and we were on our way, a few short miles off the beaten path we were royally entertained by the Preston-Patrick Branch of the Women's Institute.

Then we were taken to Endimoor School where our hostesses were waiting with anticipation to meet their friends from Canada. It was only a matter of seconds until we were "purred up" as they say and the din of chatter told the story of pleasure and joy in mutual relationship. Coffee, Tea and sweets (cookies and cakes) were served by the brownies and girl guides—"Peggy" presented one of Mr. William Barrie's famous gravels made from Waterloo South maple, to the President who welcomed us and we were off to the different houses and circumstances—some to farms, some to stay with villagers and as for myself to the town of Kendal five miles farther down the road to a typical hillside attached home.

We all arrived back at the town square to board the coach with rain pouring down upon us—but that did not dampen the happy spirits of the goodbyes and farewells that were said under the umbrellas.

"For nothing stains the pleasure sweet

Not dims the radiant light"

We left for the Lake Country knowing we had made new friends and hoped we had been ambassadors of good will for Canada and especially our small part of Ontario.

The next day April 21st we continued our drive and about 5:30 P.M. arrived at Boroughbridge near York. The District President Mrs. Ann Hudson hurried out of the Women's Institute Hall to meet and

greet us. We wended our way up the stair to be met by their many members who served us a glass of sherry or orange punch as they sang their W.I. anthem "Jerusalem" and we responded by singing our "Ode".

Peggy said "I've never heard the Ode sung with more feeling" as she passed another gavel of Waterloo Maple to the President as a memento of our visit.

Trays of dainty sweets were passed and quickly we found our hostesses and were off for another memorable evening with our Women's Institute English friends. Again our hostesses out-did themselves with hospitality that cannot be described—two were taken on a sight-seeing trip—two were wined and dined as never before—and others just sat cozily beside a wood-burning fire-place chatting for the evening but—

"Each did seek the common weal

The good of all mankind"

Again the next morning we arrived back at the town square at 9:00 A.M.—much too short a stay, goodbyes were said but this time Mrs. Hudson joined our tour of York, The Yorkminster Cathedral and other historic sights, pointing out the Alter Cloth at "The Minster" which had been made by Women's Institute members—a gorgeous piece of handwork. We arrived at the noon hour at the Women's Institute House on Tadcaster Road for lunch.

We were welcomed at the entrance by the Vice-President, Mrs. Ann Nelson who lunched with us and we enjoyed rice and beef casserole and a variety of mouth-watering desserts, wish we could sample every one. The catering committee were most attractive in bright orange smocks and quickly served forty-five hungry Canadians. We were able to buy a W.I. spoon and a "Yorkshire" Pin which we proudly wore for the rest of the tour, placing it beside our own "Home and Country" badge, symbols of the friendship of our two countries.

We bid "Ann" farewell with cameras flashing and everyone dreaming that someday we in Ontario might have a W.I. House to entertain our friends just as we had been so supremely entertained.

Four days later we arrived at Canada Hill Women's Institute in South Merstham in Surrey which is nestled between the North and South Downs of England, about 7:00 P.M. on Monday April 25th. After a beautiful trip through English Countryside around winding roads lined with hedges and stone fences, flowering crab trees, millions of tulips and daffodils and quaint little villages nestled in snug valleys as we drove from Oxford to our destination.

Smiling ladies came popping out of their homes from all directions as our bus drove slowly down Devon Street to the Hall. The President, Mrs. Diane Brown stepped into the bus and invited us all to 'freshen-up' and return to the hall for a sit-down supper. Green and white striped table cloths covered the tables—flowers were placed here and there about the hall with the focal point being the embroidered table cloth covering the platform table, with the crest and name in silver. A delightful supper of Pork Pie-patties-peas-carrots and a variety of desserts, topped