

WARWICKSHIRE, ENGLAND.

PRESENTED BY VAL MORTON,
ROWINGTON, WARWICKSHIRE, &
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SPOTLIGHT



Members of Quinton and Admington WI, assisted by tower master Robert Hughes, ring in 100 years of the WI in Quinton Church yesterday (Wednesday).
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Sound of 100 years of the WI rings out

THE SOUND of church bells echoed through South Warwickshire yesterday (Wednesday) as Women's Institute members marked a very special occasion.

For from Rowington to Whichford, WIs in the south of the county celebrated the organisation's centenary.

Bells were rung in churches throughout the area, from Holy Trinity in Stratford, to St Peter's in Barford, Holy Trinity in Hatton and St Mary and All Saints in Haselor.

As well as bell-ringing, Haselor and Walcote WI also planted a buddleia bush in the churchyard to commemorate the anniversary.

Ringling church bells wasn't the only way local

WIs marked the occasion: Rowington WI didn't have any local churchbells so instead members celebrated by ringing handbells.

And handbells were also the order of the day for Newbold WI, Great Alne and Kinwarton WI unfurled the Union flag outside the church hall and cut a 100th anniversary cake.

For many people the Women's Institute is as English as cricket on the village green but in fact the organisation was founded in

By Sara Hurst

Canada.

It was the brainchild of Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, an Ontario farmer's daughter, whose fourth child died of what she believed was her own ignorance of basic hygiene.

Adelaide decided to organise classes and demonstrations in domestic science and home crafts for rural women through the local farmers' institute.

The idea soon spread and it was decided to form a separate women's institute. The first meeting took place on 19th February 1897 in Stoney Creek, Ontario.

Soon there was a network of Women's Institutes throughout Canada and several attempts were made to import the idea to Britain.

But they didn't meet with success until 1915, when the first British WI was formed in Llanfair, Anglesey, North Wales.

The movement, originally formed under the auspices of the Board of Agriculture, caught on very quickly.

In 1919 the institute became independent of the board, with responsibility falling to WI's national and county federations.

By the end of that year there were 1,405 WIs in England and Wales.

The Warwickshire Federation was set up in 1918, by which time four WIs, all of them in South Warwickshire, were already in being.

The first WI to be set up in the county was Tysoe WI, in April 1917. Newbold followed in July

1917, Kineton in September and Harbury in February 1918. There are now 129 WIs in the county with almost 4,000 members.

Mention the WI to most people and the first things to spring to mind are jam and Jerusalem but modern day members are quick to point out it's about much more than that.

In the last few months alone WI members in South Warwickshire have enjoyed talks at their monthly meetings on the work of customs and excise officers against smuggling, television monitoring and ratings, the National Trust, music hall and the county air ambulance.

They also enjoy a wide variety of activities from the traditional cookery and needlecrafts to wine-tasting, theatre trips, visits to the races and line dancing.

Beryl Sayers, of Haselor WI, says: "It's a good organisation. A lot of people look

down their noses at the WI thinking it's a lot of old fogeys and it's all jam and Jerusalem but it's not like that at all, it's very up to date."

Beryl says that as well as talks and activities, Haselor members get involved in competitions and have won the Warwickshire Fire Service quiz two years on the trot.

"We enter most things, although we are only a small village," she adds.

But she points out there is also a serious side to the WI. One of the aims of the organisation is to educate women and it has its own college, Denman College, in Marcham, Oxfordshire.

Like many other WIs, Haselor offers a bursary for members to study at the college, which offers some 400 courses in a huge range of subjects.

The WI also takes an interest in social and public affairs.

Beryl has been a delegate at the WI's national conference, where every year it discusses and adopts resolutions put forward by the county federations.

The WI's national executive committee then campaigns on those issues and their work means that sometimes sees these ideas enshrined in law.

Resolutions last year included calling on the Government to reinstate a realistic grant for higher education students from limited income families, making NHS dental

treatment available to everyone and making cooking, nutrition and parenting skills part of the National Curriculum.

Even if the resolutions are not immediately acted on by the authorities they become part of WI policy.

For example, the WI first campaigned against mixed hospital wards 20 years ago and recently, finally achieved success.

It was also one of the first organisations to press for breast cancer screening and is currently campaigning for screening for testicular and

shire Rural Community Council, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

Jean Bingham, president of Great Alne and Kinwarton WI, agrees the WI can have its serious side although the organisation is friendly.

"The WI offers friendship, that's one of the most important things. We're a caring group of ladies but we are also interested in social matters."



Great Alne and Kinwarton WI president Jean Bingham, left, and vice president Sue Andrews, right, toast the flag which was raised to celebrate the centenary of the WI. Members of the Women's Institute gathered yesterday (Wednesday) for a sherry and coffee morning at Great Alne village hall as part of the celebrations. Great Alne and Kinwarton WI celebrated their own 75th birthday last October.
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prostate cancer.

But this campaigning zeal is nothing new: the WI was concerned about marine pollution in the 1920s and was the organisation behind the Keep Britain Tidy movement 40 years ago.

The WI is also represented on the Warwick-

community.

"We do get involved in serious matters; we try to help the community as a whole."

Great Alne and Kinwarton WI members have helped in historical research projects about the villages and members raise money for charity.

The WI branch celebrated its 75th anniversary last October and one of the founding members was Jean's grandmother.

The branch is planning a tapestry wall hanging for Great Alne parish church depicting the village and neighbouring Kinwarton to mark the anniversary.

The branch also organises an annual produce show for the villages, which has been running for 12 years.

One common myth about the WI is that it's packed with elderly women but there are younger members and it is evening meetings which often attract working mums.

Jean says Great Alne and Kinwarton is particularly lucky in that it has a good spread of ages.

There is one occasion however when the Warwickshire members dip into the past and that is at the county conferences when members raise the roof with the hymn Jerusalem.

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Beryl Sayers, committee member of Haselor WI