

# Focus Special



# A century of women's lives

**I**T WAS cleanliness and Canada which sowed the seeds of the Women's Institute, not jam and Jerusalem.

Canadian mother Adelaide Hoodless started the ball rolling on February 19, 1897, when she ran a class on domestic science at Stoney Creek, Ontario, after fearing her own ignorance of hygiene and infant care led to the death of her fourth child.

The idea evolved and was imported into Britain in 1915, when the nation's first Women's Institute met at Llanfairpwll in North Wales.

Within four years there were 1405 WIs in England and Wales, and now there are 8350 in the United Kingdom, with 260,000 members.

And the Institute joins sister clubs as part of the seven million member Association of Country Women of the World.

Yesterday one small north Norfolk

By RICHARD BATSON

branch gathered together to be one of the first in the county to celebrate the centenary of the WI.

Bodham WI has been corresponding with the Stoney Creek branch, and put together a presentation of the movement's history from its beginnings in Canada to its arrival in Bodham in 1943.

The tea party was attended by president of Norfolk WI Federation, Yvonne Sizeland, who said: "The 7000 groups across Norfolk are testament to the fact that the Women's Institute still has a lot to offer."

"There is no limit to what people can do in the WI, from baking cakes to taking a course at our college near Oxford — you can take it as far as you want."

The aims of the WI have moved on from just domestic science, though cookery remains one of the its hallmarks.

The WI strives to broaden the horizons of rural women through "a democratic, social and educational organisation, providing the opportunity of working and learning together to improve the quality of life in the community, particularly in rural areas, and to enable them to develop their own skills and talents."

Local meetings, courses and conferences, are blended with campaigning on issues including pollution, pornography and public transport.

Experience of WI committee work and public speaking has been a confidence-building stepping stone for members to enter public life as councillors and magistrates, says the national federation.

WIs will be marking their centenary all over the globe this year — with Norfolk's branches trying to get a chorus of church bells ringing on the February 19 anniversary day.

President of Bodham WI, Joan Worsley, said: "A peal or two will let the world know we are still going strong."

County press officer Frances Mobbs said other special events were being planned, including a trip to Stoney Creek in September to see where it all began.

And members are looking to the fuchsia as well as the past — with a specially-bred Stoney Creek fuchsia plant being launched for the centenary year.

■ Bodham WI are presenting a variety show *Its In the Air* on January 18 at 7.30pm. Tickets cost £2.50 and £1 and are available on the door or from Bodham Village Shop.

*Constitution and by-laws of the Woman's Institute of Saltfleet, adopted at the first meeting at Stoney Creek February 25th. 1897.*

EARLY DAYS: Top, Bodham WI in the mid-1960s. Above, an extract from the constitution of the original Women's Institute from Canada dated 1897.

News and advertising: 01263 513232



*I, Mrs P. Burnatwell*  
wishing to become a member of the  
*Bodham* Women's  
Institute, in the County of *North Norfolk*,  
promise to pay to the Treasurer of the  
Institute the sum of Two Shillings yearly  
while I continue a member. I also promise  
to keep the Rules and Bye-Laws of the  
Institute, and all Rules and Regulations  
made for Women's Institutes by the  
National Federation of Women's Institutes.  
Member's Name *Mrs Burnatwell*  
Date of joining *2/1/46*  
Secretary of W.I. *Mrs C. ...*  
Address of County Secretary *...*

National Federation of  
Women's Institutes.  
MEMBERSHIP CARD  
"For Home and Country."  
WOMEN'S INSTITUTE,  
County Federation of Women's Institutes.

GOING STRONG: Right, president of the Bodham branch of the WI Joan Worsley gives a speech to mark the organisation's 100th birthday. Above, current members of Bodham WI. Left, a membership card from 1946.

