

Forget cups of tea and scones, today's WI want cocktails

JAM and Jerusalem have been replaced with canapes and Craig David by a new breed of glamorous WI women.

The Women's Institute may be celebrating its 90th birthday this year, but it's shedding its fuddy-duddy stereotypical image as more and more modern women join up.

Lucy Hutchings, a 28-year-old businesswoman and president of London's Fulham branch, is typical of today's members.

"I think a lot of our members are quite entrepreneurial, outgoing people, and it's great for them to be able to come along, share their ideas and enjoy the company of like-minded women," she said.

Lucy's branch, which she set up, is involved in many of the campaigns that are close to the organisation's heart.

In recent years it has spoken out on the trafficking of women and children, climate change and GM foods. We probably like doing a broader range of things than our peers would have done 50 years ago," admits Lucy.

The Fulham events diary features chocolate and beer tastings, a Christmas ball, and champagne and canapes at a hair salon opening. But tradi-



FACE OF TODAY'S WI: Lucy Hutchings is just 28

tional pursuits are not forgotten, with a mince pie competition and hatmaking demonstrations on the calendar.

"So many great friendships have been formed between girls who might not otherwise

have met each other," Lucy explains. But it has proved beneficial for her professionally too.

"I work as a recruitment consultant. But because of a gap in the market that I identi-

fied through the WI, I'm setting up my own women's lifestyle directory business."

The national WI recently appointed a new chairwoman, forward-looking Fay Mansell.

She promises more WIs for the women of London, as well as a step-up in the pace of the Institute's political campaigning.

"There's been a WI in Fulham for two or three years now," she says. "It's absolutely bursting at the seams and can't take any more members. But we've had a lot of interest from people wanting to join, and are considering one in Covent Garden and one in Islington. Although women's lives have changed, in many ways the things that interest them are still the same. An interest in the community has always been there, and I'm a great believer that people have creative urges and want to express themselves in some way."

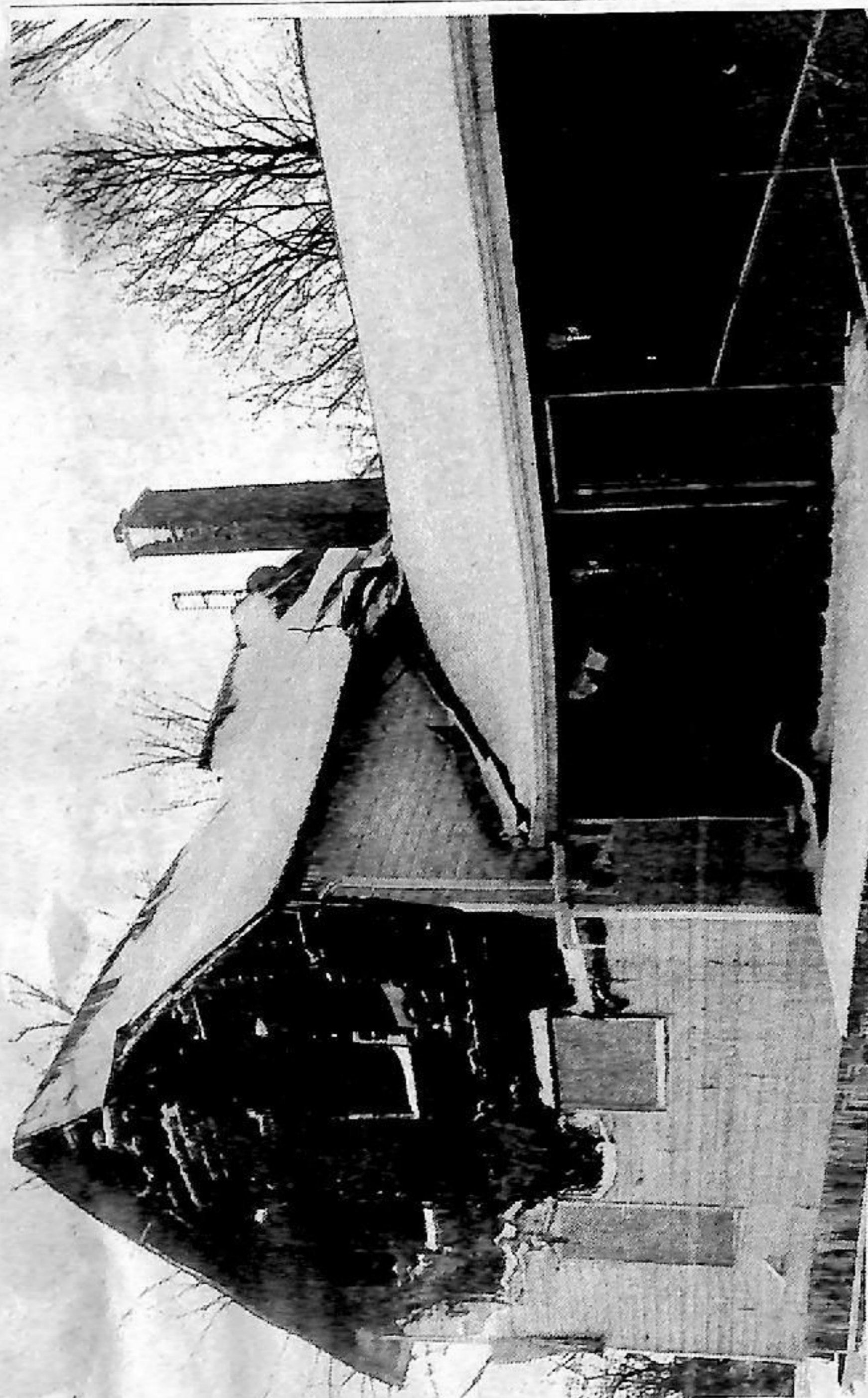
Fay, 60, says: "One of the traditional descriptions of us is as the 'quiet voice of reason'.

"Women tend to be good at seeing what needs to be done and knowing how to do it.

"It tends to be a drip, drip, drip process, but our common-sense way of thinking often wins out in the end."

THE INDEPE

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A fire broke out in a Norham house Dec. 8. The heat grew so intense that it could be felt by neighbours across the road. No one was home at the time. The building will have to be torn down.

House fire in Norham

by John Campbell
THE INDEPENDENT

A HOUSE IN NORHAM is marked for demolition as a result of a fire that badly damaged it Dec. 8.

A neighbour reported the blaze about 12:45 p.m. Warkworth firefighters, who were in the north part of Cramahne Township responding to another house fire that proved to be much less serious, raced back to find "a lot of heavy black smoke and flames shooting out" the second floor windows, Fire Chief Bill Kelly said.

About two dozen firefighters, including volunteers from Cramahne, Hastings and Campbellford, attended the scene.

Firefighters remained there for about five hours.

An hour after returning to their hall in Warkworth, the village's firefighters had to go out again to Dudley Road around 7 p.m., after receiving word that the fire had "flared up" a second time, Mr. Kelly said.

The fire is believed to have started near the electrical panel on the first floor and spread up through the wall into an upstairs bedroom.

Mr. Kelly estimated the damage, including contents, at roughly \$350,000.

Rod Newman, who lives in the house, was not home at the time. The trucker was making his way through Arkansas when he

learned what had happened.

"He was upset," his father Gary said, especially at losing some NASCAR memorabilia he treasured. However, many valuable antiques and photos were removed before the fire could reach them.

"The firefighters were just great," Mr. Newman said. "Anything you asked for that they could get, they got and handed it out the door to you."

Five years ago the house opposite the Newman home burned down. There hadn't been another house fire in the Percy ward since then - until this year. Last week's blaze was the third for 2005.