

Tweedsmuir Histories

A Canadian, Mrs. Alfred Watt took the Women's Institute message to England and in 1915 set up the first Institute group at Angllsey in Wales. Queen Mary heard of the New Organisation, recognised its potential and had a branch formed at Sandringham, where she became the first president. The Queen Mother, Elizabeth, the Queen and Princess Margaret are all members of the Sandringham Institute.

The Institute Motto is "For Home and Country." Home making skills and family oriented projects were the main objectives, but Mrs. Hoodless, the instigator of the W.I. was also concerned about the community and education. She urged that community and village histories be kept. It wasn't until 1936 that Lady Tweedsmuir became involved.

Lady Tweedsmuir was born Susan, Charlotte Grosvenor in 1883 to the well to do family of Norman Grosvenor. Her great uncle was the Duke of Wellington (the iron duke). After the death of her father in 1898, she, her sister and mother lived with various family members, although they still had their own house in London. Several of the family were noted artists, and from a very early age, both girls were exposed to political discussions, writers and artists, although with their Victorian upbringing they were to "be seen and not heard". Through her maternal grandmother she became involved with emigration schemes and her grandmothers "pet project" an East End mother's rest home. Her formal education was completed in Germany, studying Art and Opera.

In 1904 she met John Buchan, he found her haughty and she thought him conceited and difficult to talk to. He was a promising young lawyer and for the next year he was in South Africa on a law case. On his return they met again through mutual friends and became engaged. A year later, in 1907 they married. They had four children, a daughter and three sons.

Lady Tweedsmuir was a lady of many talents and well matched with her husband, he having an unquenchable desire for life and adventure. They worked together creating and operating the Department of Information after the 1914-18 war. The success of this led to his appointment to the Foreign Office and eventually with his prominence as a writer, he became well known in political circles. In 1935 King George 5th appointed Lord Tweedsmuir as the 15th Governor General of Canada, a position which John Buchan, always interested in Canada, felt had immensely interesting potentialities and great responsibilities.

In 1933 the W.I. convenor of historical research has suggested the histories of farms, buildings and places of interest should be saved. It was in 1936 when Lady Tweedsmuir, an active W.I. member in Britain, became involved. At a meeting of the Athens branch, she stressed the need for this preservation.