

## **Countrywomen in Action - Voluntary Action in the National Federation of Women's Institutes 1917-1965**

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**Paper given at** On September 11th 2001 to

*'400 years of Charity – a conference on the history of voluntary action'*

at Liverpool University. A conference organised jointly by the Voluntary Action History Society, the School of History at Liverpool University and the Centre for Voluntary Organisation at the London School of Economics. It was timed to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the Elizabethan statute of 1601 which laid down the foundations for the modern framework of charity and the 2001 United Nations International Year of the Volunteer.

### *Abstract*

This paper describes how women in rural Britain gradually learned to take action on behalf of themselves and their communities, and the role that their membership of the Women's Institute (WI) played in that process.

Action at a national level is analysed by considering the subject matter of the resolutions discussed at the AGMs of the NFWI between 1917 and 1965. Comparing the subjects debated in the first 20 years with those in the 20 years after 1945 a change in emphasis reflects the changes in rural society.

The degree to which national concerns are reflected in local WIs and the action being taken by the WIs in their own communities is considered by reference to the records of a representative sample.

## **Countrywomen in Action**

### **Voluntary Action in the National Federation of Women's Institutes 1917-1965**

#### **The start of WIs in Britain**

The first WIs in Britain were opened in 1915. The Government saw them as a means of mobilising countrywomen to help with food production during war time; the Director of the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture laid down the challenge:

*We have to prevent hunger - every ounce of food which can be grown in this country must be grown, and every woman who can give a hand in this vastly important work must give a hand<sup>i</sup>*

In 1917, by which time there were 140 WIs in England and Wales, the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) was formed as an independent organisation with an elected National Executive Committee (NEC).

Many of the women elected to the first NEC had been involved in campaigning for women's suffrage including Lady Gertrude Denman, wife of Thomas the third Baron Denman who chaired the NEC for the first 30 years. She was supported for 23 years by Vice-Chairman Grace Hadow, a tutor at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford who had been an active member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). NFWI's first Treasurer, Helena Auerbach, had previously been Treasurer of NUWSS. Lady Isobel Margesson had worked for the Women's Socialist and Political Union and chaired many of the meetings at which Mrs Pankhurst spoke.

With such leaders it is not surprising that one of the primary aims of NFWI was to educate women to become active citizens.

Prior to the First World War Britain had suffered from a long period of agricultural decline, and now the war was over there was a determination that things would be better:

*It has been long felt by those who have given thought to the problems of rural renewal in this country, and who recognise that the maintenance and development of the Agriculture industry depend on improved social and economic conditions, that fuller co-operation of women is necessary for the complete success of such renewal.<sup>ii</sup>*

Lady Denman was a great champion of ordinary countrywomen. She felt that they had an important part to play in the development of rural life, she wanted to open the WI member's eyes to a wider vision, and to lead them to think about, and work for, improved social conditions in the villages. So, once the war was over and providing food was no longer the main priority, the Women's Institute movement pursued its two central aims: to improve the conditions of rural life, and to educate women to become active citizens.

### **Improving conditions of rural life**

The NFWI was a non party political organisation, and the firm intention was that the membership should cross social boundaries.

*The success of an institute must depend on the inclusion of women of all ranks in its scope. Their aim of mutual help and combined effort can only be achieved by a better understanding of each other's needs and interests and the points of view from which these are regarded.<sup>iii</sup>*

One of the most remarkable things about the new WIs was that they really did cater for all classes of women. The analysis of the membership of Ringmer WI (East Sussex) opened in 1920 illustrates this. The membership records show that, within the first two years, 43% of the women in the community had joined.

Table: Membership of Ringmer WI in 1920/21

Description of 'class'	% of membership
'ladies'	11%
farmer's wives	11%
'in trade'	13%
known to be farm labourer's wives ( lived in tied cottages)	8%
live-in domestic servants/Lodge keepers	2%

The occupations for many of the 'cottagers' are not definitely known ; but there were 2 publican's wives; 2 teachers; the Headmaster's wife; the Vicar's wife and daughter; the District Nurse; the policeman's wife; the sexton's wife, the postmaster's wife, the parish clerks' wife; the Parish Council Chairman's wife, and a resident of one of the alms houses.<sup>iv</sup> It is significant however that the first President was the Hon. Mrs Pelham, wife of the heir to the Earl of Chichester, and the most 'aristocratic' of the members.

Some of these women may well not have spoken to each other before - certainly not as equals, but they were told at the first meeting by the visiting WI organiser that they:

*.....were sisters the moment they entered the Institute room whether duchess or sweeper's wife, they were out to help and encourage each other no matter what religion - churchmen or nonconformist.<sup>v</sup>*

The lives of many of these women were hard. Many had large families; some would have been through the trauma of one of their children dying<sup>vi</sup>. Many lived in cottages that were difficult to heat, where they had to get their water from a well, use oil lamps for lighting, a pail under the sink for drainage and a pail or earth closet<sup>vii</sup>, so it is not surprising that housing was of paramount importance - a fact acknowledged in a report produced in 1919 by the *Ministry of Reconstruction*:

*Housing is essentially a woman's question. Bad as may be the effects of present housing conditions for the man, they are worse for the woman, since she has to endure them the whole day long..... With the extension of the franchise to six millions of women, for both parliamentary and local government purposes, it is to be expected, and indeed highly to be desired, that in future women should take a much larger interest and much more active part in public affairs.<sup>viii</sup>*

The report went on to recommend that:

*.....preparation of schemes of housing should be drawn up in consultation with representatives of women, who are the persons most concerned.*

So it was that the first of the nationally co-ordinated campaigns organised by NFWI

concerned housing. In her book *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, Maggie Andrews noted that if the

*Women's Labour League and the Women's Co-operative Guild throughout their campaigns around housing were opening up the home as a legitimate arena of political struggle for women in the towns then NFWI undoubtedly did the same for rural women. Campaigns around housing, water supplies and drainage could, in a real sense, operate to politically motivate women who might otherwise regard the political process as alienating*<sup>ix</sup>

At the second Annual General Meeting (AGM) of NFWI held in October 1918, and attended by 500 delegates, the following resolution was moved by Epping WI (Essex):

*That the provision of a sufficient supply of convenient and sanitary houses being of vital importance to women in the country, County Federations and Women's Institutes are urged to bring pressure to bear upon their local councils and, through the National Federation, upon the Local Government Board to ensure that full advantage is taken in their districts of the Government scheme for State-aided Housing*<sup>x</sup>

Mrs Trenow from Epping WI made a passionate speech:

*In rural areas the conditions are absolutely disgraceful and scandalous, and I think we should urge our councils and everybody to improve conditions, because not only from the physical but from the moral point of view we must do all in our power to awaken people to the necessity, and to the scandalous things that go on in rural areas...*<sup>xi</sup>

Other speakers were equally stirring: "*..the WI must play its part in the reconstruction for the men who won the war!*"; "*..the old cottages are men-stys*"; "*..give us better and more sanitary cottages...*"; "*..women! it is a disgrace to England that any person should live, or any child be born, in an insanitary dwelling place..*"<sup>xii</sup>

The resolution was carried. Now the WI members had to take action themselves. The WI's 'in-house' magazine *'Home and Country'* reported how WIs did this, for example Powerstock WI (Dorset Federation ) requested the housing committee of the District Council to give them an opportunity to see and express their views on the draft plans of the cottages the Council proposed building in their parish. Other similar reports are found, however many of the requests fell on deaf ears, frequently "requests were refused"<sup>xiii</sup>. There were some successes, in West Kent one Institute appointed a sub-committee to meet the architect of local housing, he substantially adopted all the suggestions they made<sup>xiv</sup>.

Alice Williams, the first secretary to NFWI, commented:

*The knowledge that **their** work and **their** brains are being used for the betterment of future homes,.....must be an incentive and an encouragement to many women who never before had any idea that in them lay the ability to do anything but drudge*<sup>xv</sup>

However the organisation soon learned that in order to get the desired action sustained pressure may be required, and further resolutions on housing were debated at Annual

Meetings in 1923,1924,1928, 1935, 1938, 1945, and 1947.

### **Educating women to become active citizens**

The housing resolution has been described in detail to give a flavour of how the campaigning role of the organisation started. Women were joining the newly formed WIs in large numbers, by 1922 there were 160,000 members in 2,580 WIs. NFWI organised training throughout the country to teach members how to run their own WI. One man was impressed by the speed with which the women learned, saying that he had been:

*.....one of the many who doubted the capacity of women to conduct even their ordinary business with success but," he added, "I have learned more about women than I have learned in forty years...<sup>xvi</sup>.*

Learning how to run a meeting properly gave women more confidence to get involved in public life. At the NFWI's 1919 AGM it was proposed

*That it is advisable to have Women's Organisations such as WI represented on Parish Councils and District Councils or on sub-committees to deal with health and housing*

In moving this Lady Pinnie, a District Councillor said:

*...Now that we have this educating body, let us educate our people to realise that it is their duty as citizens to take their part in Parish and District Councils<sup>xvii</sup>*

Before long WIs were recording how some of their members had taken up this challenge. For example, in 1920, Battle WI (Sussex) recorded that

*The chief event of the year had been the election of one of the members, Mrs C Sheppard, to the Council and it was hoped that others would follow her excellent example.<sup>xviii</sup>*

Also in 1920 Lewes St Anne's WI (Sussex) offered

*.....a hearty vote of congratulation to Mrs Wood on her election as the first woman councillor.<sup>xix</sup>*

It was not just at local level that the WI was encouraging women to become active. In 1919 the National Vice Chairman asked counties to send the names of suitable candidates to serve on Government committees. As she explained at the AGM

*.....a short time ago a cabinet minister said to me 'can you tell me of any good representative woman... there must be more qualified women and the Government would be glad to know of them'.<sup>xx</sup>*

### **The issues debated at AGMs in 1920s and 30s**

An analysis of the subject matter of successive AGMs gives an interesting insight into the development of the organisation, and also into the concerns of the women living in rural

Britain at the time. The subject matter of the 136 resolutions discussed between 1919 and 1939 can be divided into four broad categories<sup>xxi</sup>

a) **those which are of special concern to women** when the action is as a *women's* organisation: this includes the appointment of women to public posts (magistrates, jurors, school governors, policewomen) and legislation affecting nutrition, health and related to children.

b) **those with a peculiar rural significance** (as distinct from urban) when action is as a *country* organisation : this includes planning and the countryside, collection and disposal of rubbish, sewerage, water, electricity and telephone supplies in rural areas, postal, telephone and bus services, animal welfare and some of the regulations affecting farming

c) **those which are of special concern to Country women** -- the election of countrywomen to Parish, District and County Council and their committees; the provision of agricultural and horticultural education relevant to the needs of the country women as domestic food producers; the provision of analgesia in childbirth for women in rural areas.<sup>xxii</sup>

d) **those that promote international understanding.** Immediately after the end of the War there was a request that women should take an active part in the Peace Conference, then throughout the 1920s a series of resolutions urged all WIs to study the principles underlying the League of Nations. The theme continued in 1934 with a *desire to reaffirm our faith in the League of Nations and to urge HM Government to continue to do its utmost to secure a real measure of world disarmament...*<sup>xxiii</sup>

Some of the subjects discussed were quite daring for women of that time, for example urging the Government to pass the Bastardy Bill (1920) or to include public health education about venereal disease (1922) - a subject introduced by the NEC.

Over half of the resolutions (59%) in this period were proposed by the leaders (ie NEC or County Federation executive committees), but there were resolutions reflecting local concerns, for example, also in 1922, Great Waltham WI proposed that :

*motor omnibuses and lorries....should carry a guard...to prevent persons and animals from slipping under the wheels*

probably reflecting a nasty accident in their village.

### **Working on the mandates**

Once resolutions had been carried at the AGM then the follow up work started. The majority (66%) urged the Government to take some action, and NFWI presented the case to the government of the day on behalf of WI members. At national level the methods used were those already tried and tested by the leaders, particularly Lady Denman, who determined the 'softly - softly' approach. Her previous experience with the Liberal Women's Federation had

*.....taught her the machinery of a big organisation, she had seen the Countess of Carlisle in action intervening here, sending a letter there, pulling strings and*

*interviewing cabinet ministers when needed.... above all she had been recruited into the thick of the battle for equality for women in what was still a man's world* <sup>xxiv</sup>.

Many of the women on the NEC mixed socially with influential people, some were married to Peers, others were related to Government Ministers, and they were prepared to use their personal networks on behalf of their fellow members. At the end of one debate, on the state of lavatories on the railways, Lady Denman said

*I am having dinner with one of the Railway Board members tonight, I shall tell him!*  
<sup>xxv</sup>

Mrs Margaret Wintringham - the second woman to be elected to Parliament <sup>xxvi</sup> was a member of the NFWI executive committee from 1922 to 1924, and was widely known as *our Institute MP* <sup>xxvii</sup>. She was able to guide WIs in the methods of lobbying. At the 1922 AGM there was a resolution about the importance of retaining women police. Women had been recruited to the police force during the war, when there was a shortage of men, but now the government was trying to disband them. Delegates at the meeting were told

*Lady Astor and Mrs Wintringham, who are fighting for women police in the House, are waiting to hear the opinion of all women in the country on this question.* <sup>xxviii</sup>

Once the NFWI executive committee had a mandate to act, if the resolution was urging the Government to do something, then they sought an early interview with the relevant Minister. They scrutinised the parliamentary programme and made due comments as appropriate, by personal contact and by letter. This was backed up by the action of the County Federations, who made sure that their local MPs knew the views of their WIs, they wrote letters and sought interviews, giving any local slant on the questions raised. Gradually the organisation became known to those in Westminster and their opinions were sought - this was the 'intelligent dialogue' with the decision makers which the leaders had envisaged.

All this activity was reported back to the members through the pages of *Home and Country*; through the Consultative Councils (NEC and Federation representatives); directly to WIs through the Annual Report; to the delegates at the AGMs when Lady Denman, and others, reported back on what had been done during the previous year on their behalf.

The organisation had been set up initially with considerable financial support from the Government and there were representative members of various government ministries (especially education and agriculture) on the NEC, and relevant sub-committees. These people were able to provide some 'inside information' and briefings about impending legislation. NFWI was consulted by the Government on issues relating to women and rural issues and was able to make detailed responses, often backed up by considerable research from amongst the members. The WIs were happy to answer 'questioneries' and this ability to elicit views of women from all over the country was taken seriously by the Government. NFWI's views, which were presented in a level-headed and reasonable way in the papers written by the NFWI staff, carried weight.

### **Local response to AGM resolutions**

All this led to a great deal of activity at the London Headquarters, but for many local WIs

what went on in London seemed a bit remote. The minute books of local Sussex WIs show that most of them did no more than record the name of their delegate to the AGM, and the fact that they had discussed the resolutions. On a rare occasion they record how they had instructed the delegate to vote, though one Sussex WI, in 1924, noted that

*.....the opinion of the committee was taken as the voice of the institute on those questions (ie the resolutions for the AGM) which were too numerous or technical to put before the members at the monthly meeting<sup>xxix</sup>.*

Once the AGM was over, the delegate reported back to the WI meeting. These reports are usually recorded with minimal detail, a typical one reads:

*Mrs Parott read an excellent report on the AGM at which she had attended as Ringmer WI delegate.<sup>xxx</sup>*

It would seem that, once the resolutions had been passed at the AGM most WIs were happy to leave the campaigning to NFWI, and little is heard of them at local level. However 34% of the resolutions passed in the first 20 years asked the local WIs to act in some way. Many of these were asking the WIs to 'study' or 'inform themselves' about some subject, for example, in 1924 they were asked to:

*.....bring the question of vaccination before Women's Institute meetings with a view to studying it on its merits.*

Other resolutions of this type urged members to inform themselves on a variety of issues, for example: the work of the League of Nations (1921), National Health insurance (1926), health of the school child (1926), care of children's teeth (1926).

To help WIs in this task both NFWI and the Federations provided information and speakers. However it was up to the individual WI to decide what, if anything, they would do. Looking through the record books of the local WIs it is clear that many of them did take up the offers of speakers; they record having talks on women police, vaccination and the League of Nations, all following on resolutions on these subjects at AGMs.

## **Local Action**

However it did not need a formal resolution at a County or National meeting to get the country women acting on local issues. In the records of the local WIs are details of very many activities started by the women in their own villages. Many of these were small scale projects but obviously very important to the local community. In Aldborough WI (Norfolk), for example it was noted that the WI

*.....has been the means of establishing a parish nurse, re-forming the cricket club and last but not least, of having a pathway cut and gravelled to make a safe approach to the parish room.<sup>xxxi</sup>*

Co-operative schemes for buying goods were set up in many WIs in the 1920s; Kelscott WI reported co-operative buying and selling of tea, Scotch oatmeal, and cheese. Warcop WI in Westmorland described in detail how it organised co-operative fish trading, other WIs ran



similar schemes for the co-operative purchase of coal. Other WIs decided to provide some amenity to lend out both to members and non-members, for example East Coker WI, Somerset, owned

*.....a chimney sweeping set which is lent out at a charge of 6d a time to members and to non members for one shilling* <sup>xxxii</sup>

Obviously a WI that cared about cleanliness as they also bought soap co-operatively. Ringmer WI (Sussex) bought a bath chair - members could borrow it for a penny a day, non-members for 3d a day, they noted that *the chair to be returned clean after use* <sup>xxxiii</sup>

The WIs were also beginning to press various authorities to provide improvements in their villages. For example, in 1921 Baslow WI (Derbyshire) sent a resolution to the local council about providing public conveniences pointing out the urgent need in the village,

*.....owing to the large and ever increasing number of women passengers by motor char-a-bancs....the present accommodation at the public house is neither adequate or desirable* <sup>xxxiv</sup>.

It is not recorded if they were successful or not, but one petition that did succeed was organised by Fotherby WI's (Lindsey, Lincs). In August 1921 they wrote to the Railway Company asking, in the name of 40 women shoppers, that the 12.20 p.m. train be allowed to stop at their station, their request was successful, and the train stopped. <sup>xxxv</sup>

## **Second World War**

At the outbreak of the Second World War the government once more looked to WI members to help with the food supply. Other special war work included helping with the evacuation of children and providing accommodation for them, and other practical tasks such as repairing rubber boots for agricultural workers, helping provide school meals, administering the 'meat pie' scheme, and making rabbit skin linings for fur coats for Russia.

There were no AGMs in 1940, 1941, or 1942, however there was one in 1943. The resolutions debated at this meeting showed remarkable optimism, looking forward to building a new and better world. The first resolution was demanding equal pay for equal work, during the war women had been doing jobs normally done by men and showing that they could do them as competently, so they did not see why they should be paid less. Other subjects covered were: appreciation that the new social security included health insurance for housewives and children; concern about unemployment, and requesting that there should be *ordered opportunity of service and earning for all*; urging the government to make provision for the small producer in post-war farming policy; a resolution requesting that equal facilities for full education at all levels be provided in town and country; and one asking that the three main services - water, sewerage and electricity - should be a national service. Finally, one looking forward to after the war requests that women should play an active part in the Peace conference and asking how WIs could help the post war relief of Europe.

There was no AGM in 1944, but in 1945 there was an emphasis on post war planning. There were resolutions urging sickness benefit for non gainfully employed married women and widows; provision of more Village Halls; asking the government to halt the closure of village

post offices and to speed up the modernisation of rural cottages.

### **Post-war changes**

In the post war period the WI membership gradually regained its prewar figure, outstripping it and reaching a peak in membership of 446,675 in 1953<sup>xxxvi</sup>. But the nature of the rural areas had changed, and continued to change. In the immediate post war period the number of agricultural holdings decreased whilst their average size increased, at the same time the number of people employed directly in agriculture fell as the mechanisation of farms increased.

WI members were changing, many of those who had been through the war had carried responsible jobs, travelled and widened their horizons. Not only were the younger women who joined now better educated, but they were less likely to have any direct contact with agriculture. With the reduction of the farming workforce many of the houses in villages and the countryside were sold to 'in-comers' who had often come from urban backgrounds. These women tended to have different priorities, for example the newcomers might press for street lighting whilst the established population were happy with the dark lanes they had always known.

The leadership of NFWI was also changing. In 1946, at the first AGM after the war, Lady Denman stood down as Chairman after 30 years, and with her resignation ended an era. No one was to serve for so long again, for a few years her successors continued to be aristocratic ladies - Lady Albermarle, Lady Brunner, Lady Dyer, and Lady Anglesey; all women who gave strong leadership, and knew about managing people and property, but none served for longer than six years.

With the changes in the nature of the WI and of the villages there was also a change in nature of the resolutions brought after 1949. In some ways this reflected the success of the campaigns pre-war. Women were now represented much more fully in public life; many of the battles to get improved rural services had been won.

The traditional rural ways had changed as well, and these were reflected in the subject matter of the resolutions debated at the post war AGMs. Between 1945 and 1965 there were 105 resolutions debated. The NEC only proposed 3% of the resolutions whilst there was an increase to 66% of those proposed by WIs (see graph A). *insert GRAPH A HERE*

### **Change in subject of issues debated**

Graphs B - D show something of how the subject matter of the resolutions changed over the years. Comparing the subjects of the first 20 years with those of the 20 years after the Second World War it seems that the organisation found a different emphasis.

*Insert GRAPHS B,C,&D here*

The resolutions in the post-war period show new trends developing; very noticeable is the decrease of resolutions about women in public life (graph B) and education (graph C). There continue to be many resolutions about women's lives (Graph D) but these are of a general nature, and could hold equally for women in towns.

Graph D shows that resolutions referring to rural amenities and services: shops, post offices,

transport, continue throughout the whole period. The resolutions about the countryside change in emphasis in the post war years. There are fewer about food production and the agriculture industry, but there are resolutions voicing concern about the loss of good agricultural land in order to provide sites for building housing estates, reservoirs, and rubbish tips. WI members voice their concern about some farming practices, for example the increasing use of toxic sprays, the intensive rearing of animals and the transport of livestock.

After 1945 there are more resolutions on general consumer matters, not particularly linked to rural areas. These include subjects such as hire purchase agreements, rating systems, various concessions for children and pensioners, and a variety of health matters such as the provision of routine smear tests for cervical cancer.

## **Conclusion**

The history presented in this paper finishes in 1965. After that date the WI cannot be considered completely rural in nature as in that year the rule limiting the formation of WIs to places with a population of fewer than 4,000 was rescinded. There were places where WIs formed in the 1920s and 1930s had now been engulfed by the spread of neighbouring urban areas and were now no longer in a community with a population of under 4,000. There seemed to be only two ways of dealing with this anomaly, either these WIs had to be closed, or else the rule had to be rescinded - rescinded it was. Now it became possible to form a WI wherever a group of women, in sympathy with the aims and objectives of the WI, wished to form one. In the literature of the WI the term 'country women' became replaced by 'country-minded women', reflecting this change.

Because of this change to some extent the organisation became less focused, it continues to fight for women, and for women who live in rural areas, but the 1918 'countrywoman', referred to by Lady Denman as 'the salt of the earth' probably no longer exists, and for that the WI itself is partly responsible through all the years of campaigning on her behalf.

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## **Endnotes**

i. Miss Meriel Talbot, the Director of the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture, Verbatim report of meeting of NFWI October 1917

ii. Pamphlet: *Women's Institutes and their part in the reconstruction of rural life* published by NFWI in 1917. (Pamphlet 305.420.6041 Women's Library)

iii. Ibid

iv. By comparing the names and addresses from the WI membership list with information available from Trade Directories (ESCC Record office); information provided by Dr John Kay of Ringmer History Study Group.

v. Ringmer WI, East Sussex; record of the first meeting held on

Jan 12 1921. ESCC record Office ref: WI 102/1/1

vi. 16% of the Ringmer WI members had a relative killed in the 1914-18 war. Geoffrey Bridger: *Valiant Hearts of Ringmer - Ringmer Village War Memorial* - pub Ammonite Press 1993

vii. PA explains that, even in the 1930s, the quality of housing in the village was very poor.

viii. *The 1919 Report - the Final and Interim reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-1919* reprinted with introductory essays by Harold Wiltshire, John Taylor and Bernard Jennings -pub Department of Adult Education University Nottingham 1980. Housing, Interim report p 82

ix. MA p83

x. SO

xi. verbatim report of the Annual Meeting 24 Oct 1918

xii. *ibid*

xiii. all reported in *Home and Country* 1919

xiv. *Home and Country* Jan 1920

xv. Alice Williams, secretary to NFWI, in a letter to WIs dated 13 Sept 1918: Alice Williams archive in Women's Library GB/106/7/AHW/H1

xvi. CD p56

xvii. Verbatim report of the NFWI AGM 15/16 October 1919

xviii. Record of meeting of Battle WI for January 1921 ESCC Record Office ref: WI 15/1/3

xix. Lewes St Anne's WI Record 20 Oct 1920 ESCC Record Office ref: WI 67/1/1

xx. verbatim report NFWI AGM 15/16 Oct 1919

xxi. IJ p 67

xxii In 1936 the Central Midwives Board approved the use of gas/air machines by midwives instructed in their use, provided that a second midwife, registered nurse, or senior medical student was also present. This meant that analgesia was not available to many women giving birth in remote rural areas where the midwife was alone.

xxiii SO

xxiv. GH p38

xxv. Verbatim report of AGM May 29th 1946

<sup>xxvi</sup> Margaret Wintringham MP, elected as member for Louth in 1921 was the first English born woman MP.

xxvii. RS p 168

xxviii. verbatim report of NFWI AGM 24 May 1922

xxix. St Anne's WI Lewes, minutes of committee meeting 24 March 1924 ESCC Record Office ref: WI 67/1/2

xxx. Ringmer WI Record of meeting July 1936. ESCC Record Office ref: WI 102/1/3

xxxi. reported in *Home and Country* 1920

xxxii. *ibid*

xxxiii. Ringmer WI, record of meeting November 8 1923, ESCC Record Office ref WI102/1/1

xxxiv. *Home and Country* 1921

xxxv. *Ibid*

<sup>xxxvi</sup> the largest number of WIs was not attained until 1979 - 9,312 although by this time the number of members was beginning to fall.