Centenary Annual Meeting 2015

There was excitement and anticipation as we all boarded the coaches at different collection points of our Federation; we were off to London to see the Queen. Stamford was our lunch stop where one coach left for The Holiday Inn at Shepperton. Our hotel at Blackheath ‘The Clarendon’ were ready and waiting for our arrival and smiling faces entered the hotel to wash and brush up ready for the evening meal. An early start was required the following morning as we had a distance to travel to the Albert Hall. What a glamorous lot we were as we stepped onto the coach, oh we at the WI can really ‘scrub up well’.

Passports, bus passes, driving licences and utility bills at the ready as we queued to enter the Albert Hall; of course the police and security hadn’t been told that the WI always arrive early, so patience was needed in the various queues at all the entrances.

The National Board of Trustees walked onto the stage dressed to perfection and wearing hats to celebrate the occasion. You could feel the anticipation in the air as we all waited for the Queen to arrive and open our Centenary Meeting. What a thrill as she entered the stage and in unison we stood, clapped and cheered.

There is nothing as exhilarating as being part of 5000 women singing the National Anthem and then Jerusalem in the Albert Hall. The Baton arrived into the Hall; prizes were presented by our Royal visitors and the Queen gave an inspiring speech to open the meeting. Suddenly it was time for our guests to retire, taste the Centenary cake, meet Julie Clarke, winner of the cake recipe and Anne Harrison. Three young potential WI members, granddaughters of Anne Harrison, Janice Langley and Diana Birch presented a posy of flowers containing the Inspiration Centenary Rose to the Royal guests and it was time to get down to the business of the meeting.

Charlotte Roberts said to me ‘I got three days off work and I have been in the WI for eight years. It is my first Annual Meeting of this wonderful organisation. This year was the Crowning Glory of being in the WI’. What a debate we had about this year’s resolution, it became very clear that this is a complex issue and it was great to hear that there is going to be further discussions on this.

Our speakers were inspirational, Lucy Worsley taking a historical look at the WI and telling us about her forthcoming television programme on this very subject, so ladies look out for it in the coming year. Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson inspired us with her humour on her family life and about aiming for what you want and doing it. Helen Morrissy. I have to say I loved her dress, what a clever lady and she has managed to combine high flying jobs raising a family of nine children and still look so slim.

As our stay in London came to an end, the following morning at breakfast we spotted Julie and Anne with the Queen, on the front page of the Daily Telegraph needless to say we bought up all the hotel’s copies, then a member of staff came up to us and asked if we would sing ‘that song’ so North Yorkshire West Federation stood and sang ‘Jerusalem’ We did sound good. Rita Swallow said, ‘We were just getting our cereal and you struck up.

‘An Inspirational Event, Inspirational Friends and an Inspirational Organisation”