

## **Breaking down social barriers Women's Institutes in England and Wales – 1915 – 1935**

### **Abstract**

*Life in rural Britain prior to the First World War was a much polarised society with rigid class boundaries. This paper explores the role played by the Women's Institute movement in breaking down these social barriers for women. With its beginnings in Canada in 1897 the WI movement did not start in Britain until 1915 when the motivation was to encourage countrywomen to supply food for the war torn nation. Once the war was over the organisation grew rapidly, at first under the leadership of elite and well connected women many of whom had been active in the women's suffrage movement. The Constitution of the new organisation declared that All countrywomen are eligible for membership no matter what their views on religion or politics may be. With reference to both national and local records this paper considers how and if this was achieved.*

### **Introduction**

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) was formed on October 16<sup>th</sup> 1917 at a meeting held in Central Hall Westminster attended by representatives of the 137 Women's Institutes (WIs) that already existed. Thus began a new organisation for women which was to sweep through the countryside; ten years later there were 4,000 WIs and a quarter of a million members.

This startlingly rapid growth had been achieved by reaching out to all women, whatever their social class, and by breaking down many of the traditional barriers in rural England and Wales. Up until this time, because of these divisions, there was little development of any corporate village life. One rural organiser of Worker's Education Association described that there was .... *in smaller villages with scattered populations, a strong class prejudice, almost feudal in its intensity. Without being able to express reasons, many were convinced that there was no point of contact between the landed proprietor, farmer, labourer and the tradesman.* [1]

Yet, in 1917 the leaders of the WI were clear in their intentions:

*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.* [2]

They realised that it was not going to be easy. Those organisers who were about to go into villages to open WIs, were warned that:

*Rural audiences were ...very much influenced by the personnel of those present. If there should happen to be a sprinkling, say 5% of what is commonly called the upper classes from the locality, the influence of the 5% will more than likely dominate the whole atmosphere of the meeting and create quite a foreign*

*psychology to the natural psychology of the 95%. Domination by the 5% is the cause of the non-success in organising work in rural areas. This domination can be exercised powerfully without the 5% ever opening its mouth. [3]*

This paper explores the ways in which the Women's Institutes were formed and how and if those traditional barriers between women were broken down.

### **Canadian origins**

The first Women's Institute (WI) was formed at Stoney Creek, Ontario, in 1897 as an offshoot of the Farmer's Institute. It drew together the women who lived isolated lives in rural homesteads to provide *...the dissemination of knowledge relating to domestic economy ...* [4]. The Canadian Government, seeing the value of WIs in education and the rural economy, provided through the Department of Agriculture lecturers and support to start new branches. The new movement spread throughout Canada and it was from British Columbia that Mrs Alfred Watt brought the idea to Britain. After war was declared in 1914 it became apparent that food supply was going to be crucial.. Mrs Watt, from her experience with WIs in Ontario and British Columbia, felt that a similar organisation might well be introduced into Great Britain, where something could be done in rural communities to help with food production and conservation. [5]

Madge Watt was a determined woman; it took two years for her to find anyone interested in her proposition; most of those to whom she spoke considered it unlikely that an idea from a far corner of the Empire might have any relevance in Britain, and there were others who maintained that the class barriers on this side of the Atlantic were too great to allow such an organisation to succeed. Finally, in February 1915, John Nugent Harris, secretary of the Agricultural Organisation Society (AOS), hearing Madge Watt address a conference and he later explained how he.... *felt that I had come in touch with the very movement I wanted.*[6]

The AOS had been formed in 1901 to encourage farmers to work co-operatively. Many women, farmer's wives and daughters, worked on the farm, often looking after the poultry and running the dairy, but without payment or recognition. Nugent Harris believed that they deserved a way of making their voices heard. He also believed that many women were more open to new ideas than men, and he hoped that they might influence their husbands and sons to embrace new practices.

Recognising that not only could women play an important role in food production in war time, but also a vital role in rural development and regeneration in peacetime, Nugent Harris was in favour of introducing WIs into Britain. He persuaded the AOS to employ Madge Watt as an Organizer to form WIs and she formed the first in June 1915 at Llanfair PG [7] on Anglesey. This rather surprising venue for the first British WI resulted from Madge accepting an invitation from Hon. Colonel Stapleton Cotton, Chairman of the North Wales branch of AOS. He asked her to address a conference at University College Bangor, her talk was entitled '*Women's work in agriculture*' and, judging by the

introduction she received from the Chairman for the day, Lord Boston another Governor of AOS, it is clear that he expected some results:

*We have received, and we gratefully acknowledge it, much valuable help from women individually in our special work, but what we now aim at is to set on foot a collective effort on their part, so as to bring into play those latent forces and those special powers which they possess and thereby to assist us in grappling with the social and economic problems of rural life.[8]*

Colonel Stapleton Cotton lived in Llanfair PG on Anglesey. Impressed by Madge Watt's lecture he called together a group of local women to meet her. Hearing what she had to say they decided to form a WI, affiliated to the AOS, and made Mrs Stapleton Cotton the first President (the name given to the person who chairs the WI meetings). The Colonel himself became a staunch supporter, and helped to get other WIs started.

In February 1916 he wrote to Madge Watt that the Institutes

*.....can fulfil a task near the heart of every good citizen. They can bring together all classes. We have been too selfish to realise how we have drifted apart. Women have the chance of their lives through these Institutes..... Before the war I was once of many who doubted the capacity of women to conduct even their ordinary business with success. During the last eighteen months I have learned more about women than I have learned for forty years. I see and believe that women can and will bring all classes, all denominations, all interests, all schools of the best thought together....The war has broken down so many class prejudices, will break down so many injustices, thereby naturally bringing us into close touch with one another, and I can conceive nobody better calculated to make us shake hands all round than woman and her work in these Institutes. Women have the opportunity, the capacity and the will to accomplish that which, judged by results, has been beyond the wit of man.[9]*

Was he correct in his great expectations? Mrs Watt had been told that Institutes would never get established 'because the classes would not mix'. But it would seem that the time was right for this new movement. The war had begun to break down barriers, and all women had started to take a more active role in the community, and at the same time the women's suffrage movement was making people, including women themselves, re-evaluate their position in society. John Nugent Harris said '*The suffragists made the pot to boil.....the Institute movement showed how some things could be got out of the pot*' [10]

### **The movement spreads**

Madge Watt had enthusiasm and tenacity, but she was told by Nugent Harris that she must not try to force the Canadian methods in this country because she ..... *did not understand the rural mind* [11] The AOS considered that they did understand the 'rural mind', and, given the class structure that existed, they felt it necessary to start by

persuading some well-connected women to interest themselves in this new movement. The Hon. Colonel Stapleton Cotton, drawing on his networks of the North Wales elite, approached Mrs Dorothy Drage. She was a good example of a 'well connected woman' - daughter and granddaughter of the wealthy Graves family who owned the Llechwedd slate quarries, her father had been High Sheriff of Caernarvonshire, Chairman of the County Council, and Chairman of the Quarter Session. She was married to Colonel Godfrey Drage who had joined the family business after leaving the army. In her autobiography Dorothy Drage described how she received a letter from Colonel Stapleton Cotton asking if she would help to form other WIs in North Wales, and having visited Colonel and Mrs Stapleton Cotton and the new institute at Llanfair PG, she agreed to help. [12]

Her work started by inviting some friends (more of the North Wales elite) .....*Miss Priesley, a well-loved landowner, respected by everybody, her companion Miss Hughes, Mrs William George, sister-in-law of David Lloyd George, and Mrs Humphries a well known farmer of the district.* [13] to meet Madge Watt. Interested by what they heard this group of women founded Criccieth WI.

Dorothy Drage formed WIs in other parts of North Wales. Meanwhile Madge Watt was taking any opportunity to form WIs in England. The records of those formed in the first five years show three points of contact were used. Firstly she used the networks of elite women, often the wives of the leading landowners, knowing that they were in the best position to get things started and that, without their co-operation the venture would surely fail. Secondly she was able to use the networks of the AOS and the County Agricultural Committees. The third point of contact was with any existing women's groups in villages, though there were very few of these.

The first WI in England formed via the AOS networks. On Tuesday November 9th 1915 Madge Watt and Hugh Christie (also from AOS) were invited, by the local War Agricultural Committee and the Parish Council, to address a public meeting in Singleton, West Sussex. The poster for this event announced that Hugh Christie would lecture on *Improvements in the Food Supply* and Mrs Alfred Watt, M.A., would give a lecture on the *Study of Home Economics.... ' Holders of Cottage Gardens and Village Allotment are specially invited. On the subject of British Homes, Mrs Watt addresses herself particularly to the Guardians of the household'*. [14] Twelve of the women so addressed were interested enough to meet again, this time in the parlour of The Fox at Charlton, and as a result formed Singleton and East Dean WI.

It was contacts via AOS that also led to the first WIs being formed in Kent. Mr Swanzy, was a subscriber to AOS funds and invited Mrs Watt to speak to women from the Sevenoaks area. The minutes of the AOS WI subcommittee note that the meeting...*had been composed for the most part of the better off women of the district, but it was, of course, the intention to include the cottage women as members.* [15] It was further noted that the Vicar of Kemsing's wife was particularly helpful, and Kemsing WI was formed in January 1916.

The second WI in Sussex was formed by elite women. Josephine Tyrell Godman, was a friend of Madge Watts and a fellow Canadian. Her husband, Frederick Tyrell Godman of Little Ote Hall near Wivelsfield, Sussex, had died whilst being held prisoner of war. Madge Watt stayed with her during her time in England, so it is hardly surprising that they decided to form a WI in Wivelsfield. On March 28th 1916 they held a meeting at Little Ote Hall.

The programme devised by Madge Watt gave a sample of what an actual WI meeting might be like, although even the keenest member would surely not expect a Russian Princess at every meeting. Princess Kropotkin was the wife of Prince Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist, who at that time was living in exile near Brighton. Was she invited as a special attraction to get women to attend?

### **Programme for first meeting [16]**

**Address:** - Women on the Land - Princess Kropotkin

**Song :** – Robin - Miss Green

**Talk:** - Goat keeping - Mrs Godman and J Standing

**Demonstrations:** - hay box cooking  
Bread mixer

**Talk:** - Women's Institutes - Mrs Watt

**Song:** Sussex by the Sea - Miss Green

**Exhibits:** comforts for the troops, war loan cards, pamphlets on domestic economy and agriculture for women

**Tea**

Madge acted as secretary and her account, which was sent to the AOS, was also copied into the minute book:

*The address by the Princess Kropotkin (Russia) was an economic contribution of great value. She emphasised the need for social and co-operative organisation of village life in order that women might be more free to work upon the land. The talk on goat keeping was illustrated by an inspection of a herd of goats and an explanation of the good points necessary. The demonstrations showed how labour at home could be lightened by these devices and women set free to do farm or garden work. Food cooked in the hay-box was shown and bread made in the bread mixer turned out to show its grain. The fine patriotic song of Sussex with its appropriate lines 'we plough and sow we reap and mow' had its place in the inspiration of the meeting*

The meeting concluded with an agreement to form a WI, Josephine Godman became the first President and the Princess was asked to be Hon President.[17] The membership list shows that some of the women travelled from neighbouring villages but there do seem to be a lot of women from Little Ote Hall and its environs, which suggest that any women attached to the estate were expected to join the new WI:

Mrs Godman – Little Ote Hall	Mrs Watt - Little Ote Hall
Mrs Worth - Ote Hall	Miss Green – Little Ote Hall
Miss Hallett - Little Ote Hall	Miss Hollingdale - Little Ote Hall
Miss Gorrington - Little Ote Hall	Miss Easton – Little Ote Hall
Mrs Langridge - Ote Hall gardens	Mrs Pretty - Ote Hall stables
Mrs Standing - The Cottage, Little Ote Hall	Mrs Fielden - Ote Hall Gardens

Other members on the list are Mrs Eric Gill of Ditchling Common, and Mrs Clowes of Brandell Lodge, Wivelsfield, who was later to become one of the paid organisers helping Mrs Watt. She was described as having ..... *a farmer's daughter's acquaintance with rural problems.....* [18]

In a few villages at this time there were already some established groups of women meeting regularly. When WIs became established in surrounding villages some of these existing groups decided to affiliate. Hartley WI in West Kent provides such an example. In November 1918 some of the small holders from the area formed the Hartley Agricultural Co-Operative Society and bought an ex army hut to use as premises and to store grain. The women had use of the hut and 14 of them formed Hartley Women's Club, which met weekly, ran a small library and organised social events. In 1921 they decided to change their constitution and become a WI. The founder President was Mrs Balchin, the daughter of a carpenter and a former nursemaid [19]. The WI Organiser who arranged the affiliation had some reservations; she reported that they were anxious to continue to hold weekly social meetings but ..... *I have done my best to discourage this, and told them to hold classes or special meetings and make their great effort at the monthly meeting. They will need watching.* [20]

### **The emerging National Movement and its Leaders**

As the number of WIs being formed increased the AOS set up a committee to oversee the work, both Mrs Drage and Mrs Stapleton Cotton were invited to be members. Nugent Harris persuaded his wife, Lillian to become secretary and then sought a woman to chair the committee who ..... *would be a real assistance to us in drawing to the work the older established families in the counties.* [21] He accepted that in many villages if 'the Lady of the Manor' did not give the new organisation her blessing then it would fail. Lady Gertrude Denman accepted the job.

Known as Trudie by her family she was she was not, as Robertson Scott noted, high in the peerage. [22] She was the daughter of Weetman Pearson ( Baron Cowdray) the oil magnate and newspaper owner. Having learned much from her father she was a sound business woman and she also had a real knowledge of and concern for countrywomen. When she married the liberal peer Thomas, third Baron Denman, her wedding present from her father was Balcombe Place, a 3,000 acre estate in Sussex . She took a keen personal interest in the well-being of her tenants, for example she improved the cottages on the estate by providing them with water and sanitation - rare luxuries in cottages in those days. [23]. At the time of her appointment she was setting up small holdings and encouraging poultry rearing at Balcombe as part of the war effort.

From 1911 to 1914 her husband had been Governor-General of Australia and, as First Lady, Trudie took a special interest in women's organisations. In her farewell speech to the Australian National Council of Women she asked them to.....*remember the wives of countrymen who worked to get the wealth of their families, but, unlike their men, had to work as hard at the end of life as at the beginning because of lack of domestic help.*[24]

Although only 32 years old when she took on the Chairmanship of the AOS Women's Institute committee, she had already considerable committee experience and was passionately committed to democratic processes and to encouraging woman to take a more active role in rural life. Under her leadership model rules for the new institutes were agreed, based on those of the WIs in Canada. These rules defined the non-sectarian and non party political character, which was so essential if the new organisation was to begin to break down class barriers. The aims of the WIs under AOS were not only about food production for the war effort but were also looking forward to what would happen at the end of the war:

*To increase and conserve food supply  
To develop village industries  
To prepare for reconstruction*

*Cooperative purchase of garden allotment and home requirements can be arranged by the committee  
Communal kitchens may be established  
Co-operative marketing may be arranged by groups of institutes* [25]

In October 1917 the responsibility for opening new WIs was handed over from AOS to the Women's Section of the Food Department at the Board of Agriculture, a section, under the formidable Dame Meriel Talbot, already looking after the newly created Women's Land Army. The Government felt that The Women's Branch would have the advantage of working in the counties through the Women's War Agricultural Committees 'who may form special propaganda sub-committees for spreading the movement' [26]

Lady Denman later recalled:

*In fear and trembling I went to see Dame Meriel Talbot, the Head of the Women's Branch, and made two main points – that the Institutes must run themselves on democratic lines and that Mrs Nugent Harris must be in charge of the office work of the Organisation. Dame Meriel agreed to these suggestions without hesitation and the day arrived when Mrs Harris and I became members of a Government Department for the first time. [27]*

At the same time NFWI was formed at the meeting, in Central Hall, Westminster, referred to in the opening paragraph. They elected a Central Committee of Management still under the Chairmanship of Lady Denman and including Dorothy Drage, and Josephine Godman.

Many of the emerging WI leaders had been active in the Women's suffrage movement. Grace Hadow, for example, who became the extremely influential Vice Chairman, was an Oxford academic who had supported the Women Students' Suffrage Society. Helena Auerbach had been Honorary Treasurer to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies before becoming Hon Treasurer to NFWI; and Lady Isabel Margesson had been prominent in the Women's Socialist and Political Union, and chaired many meetings where Mrs Pankhurst spoke. These were the sort of woman that Mary Stott referred to in *Organization Women*:

*..... some of the steady stream of well- educated women from the spate of girls grammar schools founded in the 1870s and 80s and from the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges..... Many of them, too, had learned the technique of democratic organisation in the suffrage societies..... The long awaited triumph of the suffrage campaigners must have been very sweet to them. But where did they go from there?.....There were 5 1/4 million new women voters coming on the register and the vast majority of them had never been politically minded and were not organization women in any sense of the term. What was to be done about that? The experienced campaigners had no doubt – they had to be educated in citizenship [28]*

### **Growth and Voluntary County Organisers**

Madge Watt was still employed as the chief organiser, and continued to form many WIs through her network of contacts. She had been joined by Mrs Clowes (Sussex) and Mrs Draper (North Wales) as paid organisers but it was clear that more help was required. As there was no more money for paid organisers, voluntary organisers seemed to be the answer - Mrs Godman and Lady Isobel Margesson becoming the first two. Following their success, each County was invited to select two suitable women to be trained as Voluntary County Organisers (VCOs).

The first training 'school' for VCOs, held in 1918, was organised by Madge Watt herself, and held in Sussex, in the homes of two members, Josephine Godman's Little Ote Hall being one of them. One of the tutors was Caroline Huddart, Chairman of the Sussex County Federation, and a product of the church – wife of Revd G.A.W. Huddart, daughter of Revd. Otter, archdeacon of Lewes and granddaughter of William Otter, Bishop of Chichester. She formed, and was president of, Scaynes Hill WI, in Sussex and already had considerable experience. She spoke about '*Forming in Villages*' giving the following advice:

*Endeavour to see the big landowner's wife, vicar's wife, minister's wife farmer's wife etc. If you can collect them to tea in an informal way and point out that to make a WI a success all must give of their best and all work together and ask them to explain that it is a self supporting organisation run by a community for the benefit of all, without regard to class, creed or politics, and that the element of patronage is not wanted.....[29]*

The point about patronage was not always taken. We have already seen that Princess Kropotkin was made 'Honorary President' of Wivelsfield WI and there are numerous other examples of WIs making the Lady of the Manor an 'Honorary President', though it seems to have been more a mark of respect (or to keep her happy!) than to elicit a donation.. NFWI has never had any Patrons; in 1920 when Madge Watt formed a WI at Sandringham Queen Mary became its President and paid her two shillings every year like any other member [30] The Queen herself obviously appreciated the significance of this as when she visited the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester in April 1923 The Times reported that

*The Queen, who is keenly interested in Women's Institutes, told the Principal of the work being done by her own Institute in Norfolk and strongly urged that in these Institutes there should be no patronage and that the squire's wife and the working woman should meet on the same footing. [31]*

Caroline Huddart used the term 'representative meeting', which she explained as follows:

*In all large villages there arises the 'class problem'; I have been to some WIs where the meeting has been almost entirely composed of the wives of tradesmen and retired people. That is not a representative meeting. We want the cottage women as well, and the danger is that they will not come if they think, and hear, that the meetings have been composed of others. We must get at the cottage women by personal visits and ask them to come to the WI because there is going to be an economical cookery demonstration and there may be a lot to find out at it; or will they bring that beautiful sampler ....cottage people are shy and they are proud; they will not come by themselves in many instances, and unless they can be brought into an institute at its initiation they will not come at all. [32]*

The first VCOs to be trained were women from wealthy backgrounds, with servants to look after things at home and cars to enable them to travel round the countryside. Later more 'working class' women were trained. One such person was Alice Freeman who, in the 1920s, cycled to visit the WIs. Lady Denman assured her:

*Its experience that counts. We go down the village streets and see all the nice doorways but we don't know what goes on behind them. This is what we need to know: what sort of life the village people have got because we want to do as much as we can. [33]*

## **Post War Independence and growth**

When the war ended the Board of Agriculture closed down the Women's Section of the Food Department. The Minister of Agriculture, Lord Ernle, felt that women had an important part to play in the post war development of the countryside, and he believed *...that women must combine as women irrespective of religion, politics or class, on the broad basis of womanhood.*[34] and recognised in the WI a way of bringing this about. On handing over fully to the NFWI the Government gave a grant of £10,000 in the hope that the movement would spread throughout the whole country.[35]

Now the war was over the WIs could begin to change their emphasis from food production to the more general aims of improving and developing conditions of rural life and providing for the fuller education of countrywomen and encouraging them to become active citizens. At the AGM in October 1919 members agreed a new constitution incorporating these revised aims whilst still confirming that: *All countrywomen are eligible for membership no matter what their views on religion or politics may be. The movement is non sectarian and non party-political.* [36] To lead the organisation in peacetime was a new National Executive Committee (NEC), still containing many of the same members, Lady Denman continued as National Chairman; a post she held for 30 years.

From this time onwards the organisation grew rapidly, as the following table shows.

**Table to show the growth of WIs and members 1915 - 1925**

Year	Total no. WIs	Total no. members
1915	12	
1916	37	
1917	187	5,198
1918	773	12,007
1919	1,405	55,015
1920	1,914	99,418
1921	2,237	109,200
1922	2,580	158,560
1923	2,932	174,929
1924	3,223	200,560
1925	3,383	204,460

The teams of VCOs worked hard forming and supporting new WIs. Maggie Andrews, in the *Acceptable Face of Feminism* writes that the NFWI ..... *aimed to be a cross-class organisation and indeed many within the organisation saw their role as in some respects class-conciliatory – a potentially important step in breaking down class antagonism.*[37]

VCOs were aware of the need to have a ‘representative’ group of women in the ideal WI. Caroline Huddart, County Chairman and VCO in Sussex, kept a diary from 1918 – 1925 in which she recorded her visits to WIs. During 1918 she visited 32 in Sussex, and even two when she was on holiday in Somerset. Her notes often comment on the social mix:

*Nov. 6th 1918 - Barcombe - formed the institute  
Lady Grantham in the chair and about 30 women were present all denominations  
and classes being present Lady Grantham was elected president*

*Nov. 26th 1918 Rotherfield - Though the day was very wet the room was full and  
there was a splendid meeting mostly small trades people and cottage women all very*

*keen and appreciative a very pleasant atmosphere 57 members joined.....the committee is v. representative and the officers v. capable women.*

*Dec. 19th 1919 Withyham -I formed an institute here today a very scattered parish about 40 joined they were all keen on the movement nearly all cottage people and nothing is done very much in the village. President Mrs Layng - The Rectory; Secretary Mrs Weir, Ducklings; Treasurer Mrs Back, The Station.*

*March 23rd 1920 Aldbourne –I formed a very nice institute here 33 present all joined, the members are all cottage people , several girls amongst them and all quite keen*

*October 14<sup>th</sup> 1920 East Hoathly – formed, 28 present, no non-conformists came but some have promised to attend and places have been left for them on the committee [38]*

It is not easy to discover much about the members from the record books alone. However if the names and addresses of the members are available then more can be discovered. For example Ringmer WI in East Sussex was started in 1920 by Caroline Huddart. Ringmer parish, which included several neighbouring hamlets, had a population of about 1,500. By 1922 there were 117 members and by comparing the names and addresses from the membership list with information available from the local Trade directories and information known to the local history group the following is suggested:

13 were 'ladies'	13 were farmer's wives	15 were 'in trade'
2 from the small holdings	2 were live-in domestic servants	2 Lodge keepers
2 publican's wives	2 teachers	Headmaster's wife
Vicar's wife and daughter	District nurse	Policeman's wife
Sexton's wife	Parish clerks' wife	Parish Chairman's wife
Resident of one of the alms houses		
8 were known to be farm labourer's wives but many more lived in 'cottages' and would have been described by Caroline Huddart as 'cottagers' [39]		

### **Choosing the local leaders**

Each WI elected its committee and its President each year by secret ballot, a process which was usually overseen by a visiting VCO. The democratic processes demanded by the WI constitution proved a barrier in some cases: ....*one Lady of the Manor, when she had at last grasped the notion – to her wellnigh unbelievable – that, in an Institute the President's vote (and clearly no set of circumstances was envisaged where she would not be President) ranked equally with the vote of any other member wrote to say that she with her husband refused to sanction the formation of 'such a radical organisation' as a Women's Institute in their village. [40]*

In the early years however most of those chosen as the President were upper class women, one member looking back remembered that ..... *It was always the Lady of the Manor who was President – the others wouldn't have felt confident to take it on.*[41]

In Ringmer WI, referred to above, although the women who joined were told that they:....*were sisters the moment they entered the institute room whether duchess or sweeper's wife, they were to help and encourage each other no matter what religion – churchman or nonconformist* [42] they still chose as their first President the most aristocratic person present, - the Hon. Mrs Pelham - wife of the heir to the Earl of Chichester.

The elite women were often those who first brought the idea of a WI to the village. For example, in 1919, just after NFWI took on full responsibility for forming WIs from Board of Agriculture, there was a meeting of the 'Propaganda committee' in Manchester with the object of forming WIs in Cheshire. The Countess of Stamford attended this meeting and decided that this might be just the thing for her village of Dunham Massey. The village War Working Party had been disbanded the previous autumn leaving a gap in village life [43] so Lady Stamford called a meeting, invited the working party members and others, and they agreed to form a WI, choosing Lady Stamford as the President.

That the first Presidents should be the 'born' leaders was sensible, but if the new organisation was really going to break down social barriers then the leaders had to find ways of raising the confidence of the members, to educate them and give them the skills to become leaders in their turn. One of the first tasks was to convince members that they were truly equal, that they all had skills and something of value to bring to the WI. In 1919 NFWI started a monthly magazine, *Home and Country*. Its Editor, Alice Williams, was careful to see that the 'ordinary' village women would find something to interest them. There were 'Helpful Household Hints', and in 1921 there was an article entitled: *Domestic service and the WIs.... Domestic servants are amongst the most useful WI workers, and we want them to realise that there is a very special welcome for them in every institute....*a WI member in service is then quoted: "*I didn't believe I could stay in my place at first, the village is so lonely; but since I joined the Institute I am happier than I have ever been in my life.*" [44]

With increased confidence a woman might be persuaded to stand for committee. The 'Lady of the Manor' might be President but the committee could be more representative of the village women. A good illustration of how this happened is from Eynsford WI in West Kent

*In May 1919 Lady Emily Dyke of Lullingstone Castle came round in her chauffeur driven car to ask a number of ladies who lived in Eynsford to come to a meeting....on 21<sup>st</sup> May, there were 26 women present, with Lady Emily Dyke in the chair....she put the resolution 'that a Women's Institute be formed in Eynsford'. This was carried by a large majority with none against and three abstaining. To elect the committee the chairman suggested the first name and this lady in turn suggested another. Eleven names were read out by the chairman and*

*the committee was elected by a show of hands. It was explained that the committee would continue in office until January when they would give an account of work done, and might be re-elected, or not, by the members in general.*  
[45]

The Federation representative who had been at this meeting listed the committee:

*Lady Emily Dyke –President*  
*Mrs Jones – secretary (wife of local shop keeper)*  
*Mrs Littlewood – treasurer (on last year’s jam committee)*  
*Mrs Mummery (Vicar’s wife)*  
*Mrs Felmingham (Minister’s wife – not at meeting)*  
*Mrs Rowe*  
*Mrs Lack*  
*Mrs Barber (working women – on last year’s jam committee)*  
*Mrs Gibson (working woman)*  
*Mrs Emily Baldwin (working woman – not at meeting)* [46]

(the jam committee scheme had been run in West Kent in 1918, the profits from the sale of jam being earmarked for starting WIs)

Not all the leaders were from aristocratic families, some had gained their experience in other ways. For example, at Berkinwell WI, Warwickshire, formed in March 1920, the founder President was Miss Maud Watson who had been the first winner of the Ladies Lawn Tennis Championship when it was instituted in 1884. Maud Watson was later awarded MBE and in 1922 she became the first woman to serve as a Parish Councillor. It must have been an interesting WI as three women from the village, who were later to hold office, had been keen supporters of the women’s suffrage movement. They took a stone from Berkinwell to London to throw through the window of no 10 Downing Street and were arrested and imprisoned. [47]

The lists of Presidents in a WI can indicate how successful the training of new leaders had been. In some cases the President’s role appeared to be hereditary – as at Staunton Harold WI (now in Derbyshire formerly Leicestershire). Formed in 1922 the first President was the Countess Ferrers wife of the 11<sup>th</sup> Earl . In 1928, the history records, the 11<sup>th</sup> Earl Ferrers died and the new Countess took over the Presidency having first attended as Viscountess Tamworth. However the trend did not continue, the next President was a Mrs Elsie Hollingworth .[48]

The records of many WIs show how the elite women were gradually replaced as other women from the village became more confident, and learned what to do. For example, the records of Ringmer WI (Sussex – see above) are continuous, and the succession of Presidents can be tracked. The Hon Mrs Pelham was replaced as President after five years by Mrs Chynoweth. She was a widow, and considered to be one of the ‘gentry’ by her neighbours although she only had one maid. The Hon. Mrs Pelham continued as a member and is mentioned in subsequent minutes as being the delegate to the AGM and

offering her garden for a summer meeting. Mrs Chynoweth was followed as President in 1932 by Mrs Marjory Stone, a farmer's wife and then, in 1933, by Mrs Daun the wife of a local business man.[49]

There was a danger however in removing the first leaders too soon. Wivelsfield WI, already referred to, visited and feted in its early years, was left without its first leaders after three years. Both Josephine Godman Tyrell, who had been President, and Madge Watt their 'guiding light' returned to Canada after the war. They were visited in November 1921 by Caroline Huddart who noted that the members wished to resign from the WI

*I went to a special meeting ..... the members of the WI had apparently already discussed the question and made up their minds that they would rather have a women's club and leave the WI movement, ostensibly the reasons given were that they considered the movement was getting too large for them! and that the National Federation was too arbitrary, and they resented having their liberty curtailed, [they] thought 5d per member affiliation tax too much and wondered why free speakers could not be had as in the early days. A secret ballot was taken and only one vote for continuing. [50]*

So the WI closed and became a women's club

### **The 'Ladies' learning**

The breaking down of social barriers was a two way process, and the upper class had much to learn. Robertson Scott related:

*..... a peeress spoke to me as follows: "Whatever the movement may or may not have succeeded in doing for working-class people, it has done a very great deal for the county families. I sometimes think it has done more for them than for any other class of members. Many of these county women now understand about such things as the minimum wage and the sin of working at an industry for pin-money in rivalry with people who have to get their living by it. They have also learnt something about the implications of democracy and that Socialists have the good of the country as much at heart as Conservatives".[51]*

In April 1919 *Home and Country*, reported the Inaugural meeting of a WI London Club. The idea came from Lady Isabel Margesson and was intended for members when they were in London, most of whom were the 'Ladies' who had town houses; the first meeting was held at the London home of the Countess of Plymouth (who was Chairman of the Worcestershire Federation).

Some WI members, when they read about this initiative were not happy. The President of Lewes St Anne's WI (Sussex)

*..... brought to the notice of the committee a Members Club which is being started by the London WI. It was agreed that the conditions were contrary to the*

*spirit of the Women's Institute and a protest was drawn up to be read at the next meeting and put to the vote: "That this meeting of the St Anne's' Lewes Women's Institute considers that the proposed members club is not in accordance with the spirit of Women's Institutes and is calculated to have a detrimental effect on the movement" [52]*

They had probably not appreciated what this club was aiming to do. The 'ladies' wanted to inform themselves on matters that concerned the 'ordinary women' of the WI, one of the chief objectives of these monthly meetings in London was to receive lectures and demonstrations in subjects likely to be of interest to institutes. The programmes of the meetings show that, for example, they had *a demonstration of Thrift Industries: Homely carpentering, Educraft ( simply cut clothes on Magyar lines with beautiful stitchery) and Bootmending.* [53]

The London Club also organised '*Platform and committee lessons*'

*These are increasingly needed now that women are eager to organise and carry on their own Institutes. Young women specially are now wishing to be able to take their part in meeting and committees without shyness due to strangeness or to ignorance of correct methods. The lessons will be on Taking the chair, Three minute speeches on set subjects, prepared and unprepared, Questions and Answers, Introductions, Votes of thanks, Reading aloud statements, Drawing up agendas, Writing minutes and Committee procedure.*[54]

### **Activities in the Institutes**

The women who joined the WI, coming from such different backgrounds, had to learn to get on together and trust each other. Madge Watt taught that at every good WI meeting a member should have 'something to hear, something to do and something to see'. The early programmes contain lots of variety at each meeting - a talk, a demonstration, a display - nothing lasted for very long. One popular way of getting everyone to participate was the 'Roll call' to which all were expected to make a contribution, for example they may be asked to share with the others 'my best household hint' and the farm labourer's wife might have a better hint than the lady of the manor. Another way in which the 'ordinary' member might excel was through the competition, held at most meetings. The intention behind most competitions, be it for a child's knitted jumper or for the most neatly darned sock, was to help to improve member's skills through the comments made by the judge.

Towards the end of the meeting there was 'social time' during which games might be played. In her introduction to the booklet *NFWI Games* published in 1934, Mrs Hurst Simpson, Regular Organiser for the Midland area, wrote:

*The playing of games in the right spirit can be a true piece of communal work, one which is not only worth while, but which may even be a duty of an institute member. We find unexpected qualities of character among our fellow players.*

*Shyness and reserve break down during a game, ingenuity and initiative emerge, and all around us is friendliness and goodwill [55]*

The record books of the early WIs show that games were enjoyed. Many of these women had not had much fun in their short childhood, so playing ‘pig-in- the-middle’ or ‘match spillikens’ or having a ‘potato team race’ was a new and happy experience. Ringmer WI, for example, recorded in the minutes that a bag popping competition had been greatly enjoyed. Other social activities included listening to music, performed by members or played on a gramophone, community singing and country dancing.

Finally there were refreshments. Sitting down together for tea, when all members took it in turn to be ‘hostess’, was an important way of breaking down barriers and building up the fellowship of the group. Caroline Huddart told trainee VCOs *‘the Women’s Institute tea is sacramental, it brings us all together’*. This did not, however, happen in every WI. A member, who signed herself *An upholder of Constitution*, wrote to *Home and Country* in 1923 complaining:

*May I, through our paper, protest against the snobbery existent amongst the ladies (italics please!) of some Women’s Institutes. These great ones talk to us of sisterhood and citizenship etc., and yet they dig a deep gulf between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and woe betide the member who tries to cross it! When tea time comes at the meetings these ladies all sit together and tea is served to them first.....  
Is this Institute equality of membership?.....Either at these WI functions as members we are all equal or the meaning of the Movement is lost. [56]*

This letter brought numerous replies in subsequent issues of the magazine, all deploring this action, one member writing: *To my mind, one of the chief reasons for our existence as an organised body is to create a real bond of fellowship and sisterhood amongst all women of the same community.*[57]

There were also outings to be enjoyed, for many members the chance to go on a charabanc was a great treat. Equally popular were the ‘garden meetings’. These were usually held in one of the ‘big houses’. For many village women the opportunity to spend an afternoon at ‘the big house’ as an equal must have been a very new experience. For example Lady Stamford, President of Dunham Massey WI, invited members to Dunham Massey Hall, where they played clock golf and golf croquet [58] before having tea. At the garden meeting of Hellingly WI in East Sussex *...time was spent going over the gardens and boating on the water, tea was partaken of at 4 o’clock on the croquet lawn, there was a competition for the best darned stocking...*[59]. It is unlikely that the Lady of the house won that competition.

### **Working together for a cause**

One of the aims of the WI was to improve the conditions of rural life, and to encourage members to become good citizens. Caitriona Beaumont, in her article *Citizens not feminists*, considers that the WIs, along with other mainstream women’s groups, by

*.....using the terminology of citizenship to enhance women's status in society, instead of feminism,..... succeeded in avoiding any association with what was then perceived as an extreme, unpopular controversial ideology. By concentrating on the wider interests of women, on domestic, recreational and educational pursuits and creating a clear boundary between citizenship rights and feminist ideals, mainstream women's groups succeeded in appealing to a broad spectrum of women, the majority of whom were wives and mothers working within the home. [60]*

WI members avoided conflict but looked for practical ways by which they could improve their communities. Many WIs supported the local Village Hall, not just by running fund raising events but by, for example, making curtains, providing kitchen equipment, one even raised a working party to lay a new path. Many WIs supported the local school, for example, they gave prizes, provided soup or hot drinks for the children at lunch time in the winter.. Other WIs helped to set up small lending libraries, gave tea parties for old people, provided materials for the local district nurse. Some organised co-operative purchasing of such goods as fish, coal or medical supplies.[61]

With women's suffrage newly won members showed a real interest in getting WI members elected to Councils and successes are reported with pride. In 1920 the President of Battle WI (Sussex) read out that the WI had been invited to nominate ladies from their members to serve on the council. Then in January 1921 one of the members was nominated for the District Council and all committee members present undertook to do all they could to get Mrs Shepherd elected to the council 'at the top of the poll'. The Annual report recorded that she had been elected and it was hoped that others would follow in her excellent example. [62]

WIs celebrated members taking on other responsibilities, serving on Boards of Guardians, becoming JPs, serving on Housing committees. They also took note of the national success of women, Malvern WI sent a letter of congratulations to Lady Astor on being elected as the first woman to Parliament and then to the first British born woman MP, Mrs Margaret Wintringham, a fellow WI member (and a member of the NFWI executive committee).

The first of NFWI's nationally co-ordinated campaigns began at the second AGM in October 1918, with the adoption of the following resolution:

*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, [63]*

Members at all levels took part in this campaign. The 'Ladies' in the London Club met at 5 St James Square, the home of the Countess of Stratford, to hear Mrs Peel, a Member of the Housing sub-Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction, talk about "the housing problem", a discussion followed led by Miss Churton, of the Rural Housing and Sanitation Association, on "how to stimulate local authorities".

In their Institute meetings members discussed what they considered to be an ideal house, those at Lewes St Anne's WI, for example, came to the conclusion that:

*The provision of three rooms on the ground floor is necessary, but failing the adoption of this type of house in all Government housing schemes the ground floor should be divided between a scullery (containing sink, copper and cooking range) and a kitchen (with cupboards and open slow combustion grate). [64]*

Then local WIs told the authorities their views. *Home and Country* reported progress, for example Powerstock WI (Dorset) requested the housing committee of the District Council to allow them to see and comment on the draft plans of the cottages the Council proposed building in their parish. In West Kent another WI appointed a sub committee to meet the architect of the local housing who adopted some of their suggestions.[65]

Alice Williams, the first honorary 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 has any idea that in them lay the ability to do anything but drudge. [66]*

Maggie Andrews identifies this with the 'acceptable face of feminism':

*The women in the movement struggled in national political terms and locally to improve the material circumstances of women's lives. Perhaps most importantly, through the formation of a female subculture within rural villages they provided a space for women to fight the internalisation of male domination and to adopt an alternative value system. [67]*

## **Conclusion**

The WI movement in Britain started in the middle of the First World War when a new spirit of equality grew out of the urgent need to help to feed the war torn country. The leaders however never saw it as just a war time emergency measure; they saw it as a movement to be of permanent value in rural regeneration.

In 1918 Grace Hadow wrote

*The essence of Women's Institutes is their apostolic democracy.....The Women's Institute is for all alike; rich and poor, gentle and simple, learned and*

*unlearned – all pay the same subscription, have the same privileges and the same responsibilities. Each member in turn acts as hostess to her fellow members; each puts for own practical knowledge at the service of the rest.[68]*

Looking back in 1953 Lady Denman acknowledged that it had not always been easy:

*Naturally, the new ideas that people in a village and in a county should work together regardless of party politics, of their views on religion, of their social outlook, and should abide by the democratic principles by which the Women's Institutes are governed, were not invariably accepted readily. [69]*

Some of those who looked at the WIs from outside found it difficult to recognise this equality which was strived for. One, male, observer wrote in 1922:

*Outsiders who come into touch with the typical institute at once note that the President is generally the leading lady of the place. Will the present leaders of the institutes spend sleepless nights and anxious days planning for their own supersession by the labourer's wife or their own servant girl, if either of these is fit for leadership? If the Institutes' workers can stand this crucial test they will do great work for the English villages, if not they will fail. [70]*

But in many villages the 'Lady of the Manor' and the 'labourer's wife' and the 'servant girl' were all meeting and doing things together for the first time, although it was to take time for the leadership to change. Grace Hadow, in the Preface she wrote in 1921 for the first edition of the NFWI Handbook expressed something of the dramatic changes that had already taken place, even if there was still much to be done.:

*Without the War it might have been difficult to induce women of all classes to meet together, but the War made this seem natural and simple - as indeed it is - and the spirit which it implies goes far beyond the mere details of cooking and mending; it is the basis of citizenship.*

Barriers that had been taken for granted before the war were being broken down .....by women who acted as hostesses to one another. Blue and yellow, church and chapel, were no longer labels preventing personal contacts. [71]

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## Notes

*Most of the NFWI archives have been deposited at the Women's Library and are currently in the process of being catalogued, so detailed references cannot yet be given.*

*Some references are made to histories written by individual WIs. Many of these are just photocopied manuscripts. They are kept with the NFWI archives at Denman College.*

[1] Harold Wiltshire, John Taylor and Bernard Jennings (editors)(1980 reprinted with

introductory essays) *The 1919 Report - the Final and Interim reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-1919*. p.85 (Nottingham University Department of Adult Education)

[1] *Women's Institutes and their part in the reconstruction of rural life* (Pamphlet 305.420.6041 Women's Library)

[3] Mrs Alfred Watt MA, MBE, and Miss Nest Lloyd (1918) *The First Women's Institute School*, (Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes) Report of Lecture given by John Nugent Harris, entitled *The Psychology of Rural Audiences*

[4] A Walker, E M Collins and M McIntyre Hood (1948) *Fifty years of achievement*, p.10. (Ontario: The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario)

[5] Ibid. p. 46

[6] Constance Davies. (1989 2nd edition) *A Grain of Mustard Seed* p.51 (Denbigh:Gee and Son)

[7] This is the abbreviation of the full name: Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantsiliogogoch. This long name was the invention of a nineteenth century station master; until 1850 it was just Llanfair.

[8] Davies, *A Grain of Mustard Seed*, p.56

[9] J W Robertson Scott (1925) *The Story of the Women's Institute Movement in England and Wales and Scotland*, pp. 37-8 (Oxfordshire: The Village Press)

[10] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement* , p. 39-40

[11] Davies, *A Grain of Mustard Seed* , p. 71

[12] Dorothy Drage, (1961) *Pennies for Friendship*, p. 57, privately published

[13] Ibid p.57

[14] E Anderson (Edit)(1975) *West Sussex as seen through the eyes of the WI*, p.60 (West Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes)

[15] Minutes of the Agricultural Organisation Society Women's Institute subcommittee 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1915 (NFWI archive at Women's Library)

[16] Wivelsfield WI records, East Sussex County Record Office ref: WI 44/1/1  
The programme was printed and stuck into the front of the minute book

[17] She filled this role until May 1917 when the minutes of the meeting record

*'Prince and Princess Kropotkin had been recalled to Russia. The Prince was going back to realise his dream which was the education of the Russian people, and the government had sent for him to re-organise the education system. The Princess might also try to start institutes in Russia. She sent a telegram of regret at being unable to be present'*

East Sussex County Record Office ref: WI 44/1/1

Information from web site:

[http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/kropotkin/Kropotkinarchive.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/Kropotkinarchive.html)

Following the Russian revolution of February 1917, Peter (and presumably his wife) returned to Russia, arriving in Petrograd May 30, 1917. Although many revolutionaries were returning at this time, Peter's notoriety caused a large crowd to gather to greet him. The new government even sent representatives to meet with him. He took this opportunity to deliver a rather long speech in which he praised the revolutionaries and urged the defense of Russia against Germany. He was ecstatic that Russia had become the first country in history to guarantee equality to all citizens and nationalities

During the rest of this year, Peter participated in the formation of government policy. He encouraged the adoption of a system similar to that of the United States, where local autonomy was encouraged. His ideas met some resistance though due to the war. Once the Bolsheviks came to power, Peter ended much of his activity with the government.

[18] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement*, p. 58

[19] Diana Beamish (2001) *My family and Hartley WI* – MS, pages not numbered, NFWI archives Denman College (Diana Beamish is granddaughter of Mrs Balchin)

[20] Ibid

[21] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement*, p. 44

[22] Ibid p.44

[23] Gervas Huxley (1961) *Lady Denman G.B.E.*, p.31 (London: Chatto and Windus)

[24] Ibid p. 47

[25] Sussex Conference Women's' Institute from the programme cover of Glynde WI for 1918 – East Sussex Record Office WI/59/1/1

[26] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement* p.77

[27] Lady Denman, (1953) *Home and Country*, January 1953, obituary for Mrs Nugent Harris

[28] Mary Stott (1978) *Organization Women – the story of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds*. Pp. 6 - 9, (London: Heinemann)

- [29] Watt and Nest, *The First Women's Institute School*
- [30] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement*, p.194, the same pattern has been followed by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and the present Queen – but the subscription has increased.
- [31] Extract from an article in *The Times* April 13<sup>th</sup> 1923, and quoted in *Home and Country* May 1923
- [32] Watt and Nest, *The First Women's Institute School*
- [33] 'History' file in NFWI archive, The Women's Library
- [34] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement*, p. 102
- [35] Ibid p. 106
- [36] Minutes of AGM 1919 and the NFWI Constitution and Rules agreed. NFWI archives at The Women's Library
- [37] Maggie Andrews(1997), *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, p. 28 (London: Lawrence and Wishart)
- [38] From note book kept by Caroline Huddart, Chairman of East Sussex Federation of WIs 1919-1932 – archives of ESFWI, Westgate St, Lewes.
- [39] Information based on Ringmer WI records deposited in East Sussex County Record Office, Lewes ref WI 102/1/1 – 4. also information provided by Dr John Kay of Ringmer History Study Group
- [40] Inez Jenkins, (1953) *The History of the Women's Institute Movement of England and Wales*, p 13 (Oxford: The University Press)
- [41] Piers Dudgeon, (1989) *Village Voices, A portrait of change in England's Green and Pleasant Land 1915 – 1990*, p23,(London: WI Books Ltd)
- [42] Ringmer WI record 1920, ESCC Record Office, ref WI 102/1/1
- [43] Marjorie Sumner,(1969) *Notes from the Record – Dunham Massey Women's Institute 1919 – 1969*, MS photocopy for WI – in NFWI archives Denman College
- [44] Editor's notes (1921) *Home and Country*, December issue
- [45] Diana Beamish, (1994) *Eynsford Women's Institute The First 75 years*, p.2 Farningham and Eynsford local History Society Paper no 8.
- [46] Ibid p.2

[47] Innes Brett and Betty Fennell, (1970) *Berkinswell Women's Institute Golden Jubilee 1920-1970* p.2 (privately printed). Maud Watson was the second daughter of Dr H W Watson Rector of Berkinswell from 1866 – 1903 She and her sister gained their tennis practice by playing against the undergraduates who stayed in their home. Her father coached young men for the mathematical trips, this meant that there was always a supply of active tennis partners for the young ladies.

[48] Mary Messer (2001) *1922-2002 Staunton Harold WI, A Short History*

[49] Information based on Ringmer WI records deposited in East Sussex County Record Office, Lewes ref WI 102/1/1 – 4. also information provided by Dr John Kay of Ringmer History Study Group

[50] From note book kept by Caroline Huddart,

[51] Robertson Scott, *Story of the Women's Institute Movement*, p.167

[52] Lewes St Anne's WI, committee minutes for 20 June 1919, East Sussex Record Office ref WI 67/1/1

[53] Alice Williams archive, The Women's Library (GB/106/7/AHW) Programmes for the meetings of the London WI Club

[54] From the notice of the meeting of the London WI Club for June 18th 1919 in the Alice Williams archive, Women's Library (GB/106/7/AHW)

[55] M Hurst Simpson (1934) *Games for playing at Women's Institute meetings* Introduction (NFWI printed at Oxford University Press)

[56] *Home and Country* September 1923

[57] *Ibid*, October

[58] Marjorie Sumner (1969) *Notes from the Record, Dunham Massey Women's Institute 1919-1969* pp. 4&5 (MS duplicated by the WI) NFWI archives at Denman College

[59] Minute book of Hellingly WI, August 1919, WI East Sussex County Record Office ref WI 85/1/1

[60] Caitriona Beaumont (2000) *Citizens not feminists – the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by main stream women's organisations in England 1928 – 39*, *Women's History Review* Vol. 9 N2 200

[61] Anne Stamper – (2002) *Becoming Active Citizens – social action of the Women's Institutes 1915-1925*; *Essays in the History of Youth and Community Work* Volume 2 - publication pending

[62] Minute book of Battle WI, entries for March 1920, and Jan. 1921; East Sussex Record Office ref WI15/1/3

[63] NFWI *Speaking out* – list of all mandates from AGMs. This subject is discussed more fully in paper by Anne Stamper (2001) *Countrywomen in action* given at 400 years of charity conference at Liverpool University 11-13 Sept 2001, and to be published by the Voluntary Action History Society.

[64] Lewes St Anne's WI minutes, June 26th 1920, East Sussex Record County Office, ref: WI67/1/1

[65] *Home and Country* January 1920. See also paper by Anne Stamper (2001) *Countrywomen in Action* to be published by the Voluntary Action History Society

[66] Alice Williams, in a letter dated 13 September 1918: Alice Williams archive at The Women's Library ref GB/106/7/AHW/H1

[67] Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, p. 15

[68] Grace Hadow, (1918) *Women's Institutes* - Journal of the Board of Agriculture Vol. XXV no 7 October 1918

[69] Lady Denman (1953) in *Home and Country* January 1953

[70] H Duncan Hall (1922) *Women's Institutes and the Workers Educational Association*, *Home and Country* 1922

[71] Helena Deneka, (1946) *Grace Hadow* p. 176 (Oxford, the University Press)