

COVERDALE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE



‘INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY’

A brief overview of Coverdale WI between 2000 – 2024 to
commemorate our 95th birthday in November 2024.

November 2024 will see Coverdale WI achieving our 95th anniversary following its formation, when a total of 37 founding members enrolled in the first meeting on 20th November 1924 with Miss Nancy Brown as the President.

Charlotte Montgomery's 'The First Seventy Years' provides a short history of Coverdale's Women's Institute created to commemorate our 70th anniversary in November 1999. This booklet 'picks up the baton' at the dawn of a new millennium.

Coverdale WI is at the heart of the community

Coverdale WI in the 21st century remains very active in both our community and the wider Federation.

One of the events being discussed in the first meeting of 2002 was Carlton WI's involvement in a wider Lower Wensleydale group event in April to mark the last century with Carlton WI having 10 minutes to present 1970 – 1979. Everyone enjoyed the evening even if – perhaps unusually given the healthy rivalry of WI members – it was also recorded in the meeting book that the event had not been competitive!

This meeting – as do the records from meetings over the years - continues to show the planning, preparation and involvement of our WI in a now well-established drumbeat of domino drive in February's; catering (and competing in) the Great Yorkshire Show in July; Yorkshire Day in August (of course); and over 60's / community lunches throughout the year.

Like a well-oiled machine our WI calls on the large array of skills available from bottle-washing, food preparation, logistics, marketing and entertainers, flower-arrangers and more that goes into the events. Coverdale WI also takes the time to reflect and tweak where needed to try and meet the changing needs of our community. Kimberley Brereton in her President's report in November 2018 remarked that the community lunches, which had started in response to the national resolution of "Alienating Loneliness", were attracting a mixed group of people and 'certainly getting people who might otherwise not see many other people during the week.'

Tackling loneliness has always been part of WI's ethos: it came into the forefront in 2018 with the "Alienating Loneliness" national resolution mentioned above and again in 2020 with the advent of a global pandemic. The President's report, by Sara Baldwin-Cole, in November 2020 mentioned how coronavirus, covid, furlough, zoom calls, social-distancing had all become part of our lexicon. This didn't prevent, in lieu of the planned community lunches and teas which unfortunately had to be cancelled, the 'Afternoon tea in a box' initiative where over 40 people received a delicious tea to enjoy with their bubbles in their gardens on Friday 3rd July 2020. And very well received they were too!

Communities and charities that have benefited from WI in first quarter of 21st Century include Leyburn Medical Practice, Air Ambulance, Wensleydale Youth Project and Swaledale Fell Rescue. The ladies of the Coverdale WI have also contributed cash and useful items to the Jonas Centre

in Redmire, which aims to help women who were victims of domestic violence.

Coverdale WI loves a challenge

Coverdale WI took the lead in creating a cross-stitch to record of life in 2000, the 'Millenium Sampler' - hangs in Coverdale's Memorial Hall to this day. The weekly bus to market may no longer exists but otherwise much of what was depicted in the sampler remains true today.

Over the years, it's clear that walking and being outdoors have been key areas of enjoyment for members. As it says in the Stepping Out Challenge scrapbook:



Hear, hear!!

No wonder then, the frequency at which challenges majoring on walking feature bet that at Coverdale WI level; as part of Lower Wensleydale Group WI; or a Federation initiative.

The Federation Walk Group was an initiative that started in 2002 with a commemorative book travelling from WI to WI and throughout the federation as part of the NYWFWI year of health. It was 'getting closer' in September 2006 and arrived in West Witton in April 2007 before arriving in Carlton on 19th April 2007. The book commemorating the event was taken to Thoraby WI as part of the next monthly walking group planned by the Coverdale WI walking group. If it took 5 years to get to Carlton, then one wonders how long it took before it reached its final destination and where that destination was.

Sandra Dinsdale, Gerd Berit Engelen, Janet Harker and Norah Lightowler compiled a scrap book – decorated with cross-stitch – commemorating the Stepping Out Challenge in 2005 in recognition of 90 years of Coverdale WI. Monthly Coverdale WI walks, on the first Tuesday of the month, would contribute 70 miles with each member tasked with walking an additional 20 miles each in their own walks to achieve 90-mile target. The first walk on Tuesday 1st February 2005 saw 9 WI members, 2 dogs and 3 husbands (listed in that order in the scrapbook – no doubt saving the best to last and not in order of priority!) met at Coverdale Memorial Hall before setting off. Snow, sleet and rain featured heavily in the walking reports until June when there was finally a WI walk in good weather.

The scrapbook is lovely to look at and read: there are maps, photos and original art work as well as, perhaps, lesser known titbits of information. In November's walk, Marian Green spied a large black rabbit just sitting under a hedge on the approach to Tupgill Park and the Forbidden Corder. The photo of the black rabbit was included in the scrapbook together with the explanation that '...sometimes can see black rabbits in our area. The reason is that 300 years ago they were bred in Wensleydale, Warren House Carperby, for the Russian market through the offices of Tsar Peter the Great (1697 – 1725) for fur hats.'

Not all of the walks to achieve their 90-mile target were limited to Coverdale by any means. Sandra Dinsdale's record captures walks in Montana USA and walking in Glacier National Park. Anadalucia, Vesterålen in Northern Norway (at 68.5N and within the Arctic Circle) and Isle of Iona all featured in Berit Engelein's individual record whilst Norah Lightowler's included walks 'down under' in Alice Springs, Uluru base walk, Darwin and Broome.

The "Big Walk, Little Splash!" was a 2012 Federation Initiative in recognition of the 2012 Summer Olympics being held in London. The challenge was to walk or swim 209 miles between 1st April 2012 and WI day on 16th September 2012. Why 209 miles? Possibly because the first WI meeting was held in Anglesey on 16th September 1915 and the distance from Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch (a small Welsh town in the Anglesey) to the Olympic Stadium in London is 209 miles, as the crow flies. Despite a rule change in how mileage is accounted for

Coverdale WI well and truly smashed the target set by the Federation! A total of 51.25 mile were swam and 1398.25 miles were walked with 75% being involved in the challenge. Within the 1398.25 miles were Julie Clarke's 88.7 miles achieved solely from feeding her hens twice a day, 7 days a week . As befitting our now Treasurer, Julie's mileage record form captures the precise detail and calculation of 210 metres there and back four times a day, seven days a week for the 24 weeks between 1st April 2012 and 16th September 2012. For those without the mental arithmetic to compute in one's head that is an impressive 141,120 metres, or 88.7 miles.

By 2024, the Coverdale WI walking group was no more but there is talk now of reinstating a walking group (for WI, dogs and husbands) on a monthly basis following the success of the Bracken Way challenge in 2024, in honour of the 95th year celebrations. The Bracken Way was the brainchild of Julia Argent – a circa 95-mile circular walk from Settle, Malham, Kettlewell, West Burton, Hawes, Dent, Ingleton and back to Settle – was undertaken between March and October. In some ways this was similar to the 90-mile challenge enjoyed as part of the 2005 Stepping Out Challenge, but the Bracken Way brought more logistical challenges to overcome as synchronised cars, walkers, dogs and pubs at each of the start and end points of each leg of the walk. Unlike the Stepping Out Challenge, the WI members were blessed with very favourable weather conditions.

Julia Argent, Wendy Johnson, Stephanie Rutherford, Liz Whistler and Heidi Adams all completed the walk with

other members (Kimberley Brereton, Liz Sheehan, Marina Briggs, Lea Taylor, Hebe Pritchard joining us at different times and different legs). The weather was not great in 2024 with barely any real summer, which made it even more remarkable that the weather was fine on each day's walking!

Coverdale WI loves winning

Don't be mistaken it's not just the taking part that counts. It is the winning! Coverdale WI won the bulb show in 2005 for the first time since 1995 and continue to see success at the Great Yorkshire Show.

Liz Sheehan and Marian Green have both been congratulated on having photographs selected for inclusion in the North Yorkshire West Federation calendar with Liz also being awarded a trophy for her photo which graced the front cover in 2011.

The Lady Denman Cup is an annual creative writing competition for members of the Women's Institutes (WI). The cup is named after Gertrude Mary Denman, who was the first president of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) on its formation in 1917 and re-elected to this position every year until her retirement in 1946.

The annual writing competition has a history of being presented to the WI that best represents the organization's aims and objectives. In 2022 the theme was the power of community. WI members were invited, using no more than 500 words, to submit a piece of writing, either comical,

serious, fact or fiction, which reflects the powerful impact when a community comes together.

LADY DENMAN CUP COMPETITION 2022



This is Kathryn Anderson from Coverdale WI who has won 1st prize in the Lady Denman Cup Competition 2022 with her short story entitled 'Community'. The NFWI received 66 entries from 38 Federations. Congratulations Kathryn!

This is Kathryn's winning short story below:

Community by Kathryn Anderson

I entered the village hall to the sound of trestle tables rumbling like fledgling thunderstorms, as they were being dragged across the floor... Lids from shiny tea urns rattled along with insistent chatter, from gathered volunteers, in danger of drowning out a crackling radio on the windowsill. "You're on the welcoming table." A voice called out. "Ok," I answered, as I admired the bright yellow sunflowers on tables, their cheerful faces following the sun which streamed through the glass dome, overhead. Then unexpectedly it hit me - I couldn't swallow, my eyes pricked with moisture, together with a dread in the pit of my stomach as I remembered... Years ago, in this same room, flowers on tables... however these were poppies a host of vibrant poppies straining like soldiers in red uniforms towards the sunlight. I recalled searching for signs of familiarity as I entered this place for the first time and my body relaxed somewhat, as I spied these flowers of my

homeland... Poland torn apart by war from which I had fled, leaving everything and everybody behind... A flower this community had carefully chosen to say - "Welcome... We care." It spoke volumes to me!

Armed with little English, images of crumbling buildings, broken glass and scattered toys playing in my head. I stood, in about the same spot, the acrid smell of burning clinging to my clothes... My heart pounding, as I stared in bewilderment at these unfamiliar surroundings... I was in a small building on the edge of a village. I would later come to know this as the community hall. Through the picture window sheep grazed on a hillside and stone walls adorned fields as far as the eye could see. A world away from the devastation I had left! Shortly a rosy cheeked woman approached, bearing an enormous smile and portraying a kindness and assurance, which conveyed she could solve any problem thrown in her direction, she spoke warmly as she addressed my trembling self.

"Hello, what is your name?" "Anya Koval." I whispered, nervously. The years have passed, my memory is hazy, or maybe my brain is safeguarding me. However, I did begin to feel a little better on that day. I gave more family information, albeit in broken English, but the villagers were patient and kind, often smiling when we recognised a similar word or phrase. The community held me in it's arms at a time when I needed holding. They provided me with a home, food, unwavering kindness, love and support. Now, after all these years as an active member of the community it is my turn to provide the care and kindness to people fleeing from

another war, how sad we never learn... I stare at the sunflowers the community have grown specially, to welcome and say we care... We are starting here, with the flowers, but our community can and will do much more if you'll let us.

Coverdale WI loves a celebration even more!

Coverdale WI likes a celebration. Carlton WI continues to mark their anniversary in different ways. For 75th anniversary there was an elegant birthday tea with sandwiches, fruit and plain scones with jam and cream, strawberries, meringues and cakes, including a 75th anniversary cake for past and present members. A President's brooch was purchased by Coverdale WI to be handed down to future presidents.

The 75th birthday celebration – in addition to afternoon tea – included a sing along. The song sheet including Edelweiss, I could have danced all night and Any dream will do. Did the afternoon include a rendition of Sir Hubert Parry's Jerusalem – the WI's unofficial anthem? No mention made but the music sheets included alongside the order of songs and words indicate it may have been.

The 80th anniversary heralded a cruise on the River Tyne from the Millenium Bridge to the mouth of the Tyne accompanied by a live commentary on the history of the river. After the cruise, the group crossed over the Millenium Bridge to the Glasshouse International Centre for Music, which was known as Sage Gateshead in 2009, for a guided tour of the magnificent building. The return journey back

home allowed for a pit-stop and group photo opportunity at the Angel of the North.

Trip and meal to Bolton Castle, joined by husbands and partners which would have been unheard of 1929. They were then treated to a performance of “Blame it on Bartle” by the North Country Theatre.

For our 90th year there was a number of events: a circular commemorative walk that showed the beauty of the dale even when wet, followed by tea, cake and scones at the village hall. There was a bring and share supper, entertainment and memorabilia displayed for over 80 attendees from across the dale. All WI members received a commemorative apron.

90th celebration bring and share supper and entertainment at the Coverdale Memorial Hall. The entertainment consisted of a series of sketches – one for every decade from 1929 to 2019. Sara Baldwin-Cole researched and co-ordinated each of the sketches and Edgar Jenkins, a friend of the WI, played piano throughout, and his wife Isabel Jenkins wore a different hat depicting each of the decades being presented.

The 1920’s were depicted by “Tea for Two” with Linda Dent singing the solo. “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” accompanied the sketch for the 1930s; and the 1940’s were depicted by land girls singing ‘I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair’.

The 1950’s with Doris Day’s ‘the Deadwood Stage’ involved an inflatable horse which was whip-crack-away, whip-

crack-awayed to shoo in the 1960's 'Itsy Bitsy' then the 1970's 'Waterloo'.

'It's Raining Men' saw in the 1980's; 'Vogue' for the 1990s and 'Baby One More Time' the 2000s before the 2010's finale of 'This is Me'.

A fitting soundtrack for Coverdale WI for which Liz Sheehan, in her turn as Britney Spears, is still talked about in the dale years after the event.

Coverdale WI Keep Calm and Carry On.

Aside from January and February, where icy or snowy weather can prevent people travelling safely, it can take a lot for monthly meetings to be cancelled. March 2001's meeting had to be cancelled due to 'foot-and-mouth' disease. British farmers faced a crisis in the form of foot-and-mouth in 2001 with an estimated six million cattle slaughtered in total due to the outbreak between February – September 2001.

March 2020's WI meeting was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic but adapted quickly so that April's meeting – via zoom – could proceed, including the guest speaker. Every cloud has a silver lining and paradoxically with homeworking becoming a norm for non-key resources that meant that women who previously weren't able to join WI, could join and expand our numbers.

A treasure hunt, craft event, guest speakers and an AGM were all successfully undertaken virtually during lockdown. When restrictions permitted, both the bring and share

supper and Yorkshire Day were able to proceed, albeit with socially distancing factored in.

Coverdale WI has all the active ingredients needed

Coverdale WI is very fortunate to benefit from long term members who are still active in the WI. The roll call of current members that have been members of Coverdale WI for 10 years or more includes:

Dinah Alonso-Wilkes

Kimberley Brereton

Julie Clarke

Sandra Dinsdale

Janet Harker

Wendy Johnson

Meg Lumb

Stephanie Rutherford

Liz Sheehan

(NB 10 years is the maximum custodial sentence for firearm offences or administering poison to endanger life)
(Handy pub quiz fact)

Special mention should also be made of Mabel Handley who in November 2011 achieved her 50-year anniversary; Dot Suttill, Gerd Berit Engelen and Gwen Cowan who were WI members but are sadly no longer with us; and Ken Readshaw as long-serving auditor of the WI accounts from at least 2009.

The full list of former, and current, Presidents is below:

1929 – 1930	Miss N. Brown
1930 – 1935	Mrs N. Willans (nee Brown)
1935 – 1937	Mrs E. Wright
1937 – 1945	Miss J. Lofthouse
1945 – 1947	Mrs E. Styan
1947 – 1949	Miss E. Brown
1949 – 1951	Miss K. M. Westaway
1951 – 1954	Mrs B. Fraser
1954 – 1955	Mrs L. I. Haw
1955 – 1958	Mrs B. Fraser
1958 – 1962	Mrs A. W. Walls
1962 – 1971	Mrs B. Fraser
1971 – 1975	Mrs G. Brown
1975 – 1977	Mrs P. Suttill
1977 – 1981	Mrs G. Brown
1981 – 1984	Mrs B. Fraser
1984 – 1988	Mrs J. A. Clarke
1988 – 1992	Mrs G. Brown
1992 – 1993	Mrs P. Suttill
1993 – 1996	Mrs G. Brown
1996 – 2000	Mrs J. A. Clarke
2000 – 2004	Mrs M. Atkinson
2004 – 2007	Mrs N. Lightowler
2007 – 2010	Mrs M. Atkinson
2010 – 2015	Mrs N. Lightowler
2015 – 2018	Mrs M. Lumb
2018 – 2020	Mrs K. Brereton
2020 – 2023	Mrs S. Baldwin-Cole
2023 – 2024	Mrs L. Taylor & Mrs K. Brereton
2024 -	Mrs J. A. Clarke

In the first quarter of 21st century, Julie Clarke, Margot Atkinson and Norah Lightowler all appear and reappear as Presidents: Margot with a total of 7 years presidency; Norah and Julie each with 8 years presidency. What is it about Coverdale WI that attracts and retains these women?

Margot Atkinson was active in both the WI and the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW). The ACWW was founded in 1929 to bring together rural women and their organisations all over the world, and in so doing address the challenges they faced as a result of the isolation of their communities, discrimination against women, and their lack of standing in political processes.

There is a long association and strong relationship between Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), although they remain two separate and independent charities with separate governance, missions, and separate charitable objects. The individual record for Margot Atkinson as part of the 2005 Stepping Out Challenge mentions 'The Dalesway Walkers' which was a group formed in 1999 when Margot, in her role as Federation ACWW Representative organised sponsored walks for ACWW projects. The members of the group were nearly all members of WI also but even though they lived quite far apart still managed to meet for walks every 2 months and enjoyed an annual walking holiday. Margot organised a 90 mile walk from Lancaster to Tadcaster in her capacity as an ACWW representative. The sponsored walk raised £3,100 in aid of a project for women in Latvia, one of the poorest Baltic countries.

In 'The First Seventy Years' mention was made of Julie Clarke and the vital role she has played not only in Coverdale WI and as Chairman of the Federation Catering Committee. In the last 25 years her investment in the WI has not diminished and has grown even further. She has been Treasurer of Coverdale WI since 2003 (21 years and counting...) and is Chairman of North Yorkshire West Federation WI, including Chair of Activities and Chair of Great Yorkshire Show.

In 2012, The North Yorkshire West Federation WI made a fruit cake to commemorate WI's century to be cut by Queen Elizabeth II at the Royal Albert Hall. The Queen, reported by The Times. 'grimaced...and plainly amused by the recalcitrant cake, made a great show of her difficulties. As she observed, one could tell it was a fruitcake. Definitely not a Victoria sponge.'

The recipe used for this fruit cake followed a competition amongst the 200,000-plus members of the WI and was won by our very own Julie Clarke, who has been described by the local press as 'Delia of the Dales'. Julie was there at the presentation of the fruit cake for cutting by the Queen and afterwards said "the Queen said how much she loves a good fruitcake, and she could tell it was a good, rich one at is was dense and difficult to cut."

Julie joined Coverdale WI as a new wife moving into the dale, at her mother-in-law's suggestion, to help meet people within the community. Would Julie when she first

joined ever have imagined she'd present the Queen with a cake based on her competition winning recipe?

Julie is an example of one of the skilled and talented women that we have counted amongst our members, and we continue to be very lucky to a constant in Julie and one who is always willing and able to guide and help our WI. Julie's mother-in-law is also possibly an example that mothers-in-law do know best!

Coverdale WI in the future

From looking at meeting records over the decades it's been interesting to see what aspects of a meeting have remained as a constant and what has changed. The degree of formality has certainly lessened. The inner cover of the first Women's Institute Minute Book from 1929 captured 8 'Hints to secretaries on committee work' and which itself references the need to possess a National Federation Handbook which contains 'fuller information about the duties of a Secretary, the conduct of meetings, arrangement for elections etc.'

The meeting records track the ebb and flow of sub-groups and initiatives that have been created to meet the needs of the members of that time. The darts team and members involved in the annual bulb challenge are no more but other groups remain. An art group was created following a particularly successful art demonstration given to the WI. In 2010 this art group, which met roughly monthly changed

into an arts and crafts club. This then morphed, after the coronavirus pandemic, into a knit and natter group.

Joining the WI has become easier: June's bring and share, or safari suppers are typically used to invite potential members, so they can see WI in more relaxed setting and with little or no business matters discussed, but they are now welcome at any meeting. No more either do applicants require proposing, seconding and approval by committee members prior to being accepted! The activities that the WI participate in throughout the year are varied and provide opportunities to try something that might not normally be able to do. Axe throwing, archery, salsa dancing, educational talks, all sit alongside the more traditional craftworking, flower arranging and bakery demonstrations that might be expected.

There have also been a wide array of outings over the last twenty-five years. Coverdale WI were the guests of the RAF when they visited the airbase at Leeming. The ladies had an opportunity to examine a Tornado F3 operated by XI (Fighter) squadron and given insights into the work of the air traffic control.

They've been to Farfield Mill near Sedburgh, Saltaire and Levings Hall in the Lake District. They've had tours of Gentleman Jack's house in Lister, Mount Grace Priory in Osmotherley and Castle Howard. They've also – with the aid of Gunnerside WI- helped solve a murder mystery with only a little assistance from Hercula Poirot via DVD.

Coverdale WI needs to continue to accept change and evolve to survive. It also needs to keep on doing what it does so well: supporting national resolutions, helping the wider community and creating a valuable and life affirming network for its members.