

**Janice Langley – Chair’s Opening Address  
2016 NFWI Annual Meeting**

Good morning and welcome to Brighton. I hope that those of you who went on the Treasure Hunt and Tour had a good time last night and saw some of the “sights” of Brighton!!

Looking back at the Centennial Annual meeting last year in London who would have thought that one centenary fruit cake could have caused such a huge amount of publicity for the WI?

The pictures of Her Majesty the Queen cutting the centenary cake were publicized worldwide and the WI featured prominently in the Queen’s 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday documentary. As today is her Majesty’s official birthday we will wish her Happy Birthday later.

2015 was a year to remember and events carried on after the Annual Meeting in June with the WI Fair in Harrogate at the beginning of September and on the 16 September, tWitterstitch which won the PR Moments Social Media Campaign of the Year. There was the visit to the Royal Opera House in December that ended the year in style.

Indeed a year to remember - for me some highs, especially Abigail, my granddaughter giving the bouquet to the Queen and some lows but whatever was happening for me there was always family and friends to support me, particularly WI friends especially this group (point to the trustees) of committed, feisty and supportive board members. Thank you to all of them.

The roots of the WI have always been in education.

In 1897 when Adelaide Hoodless first started the WI in Canada she wanted to educate women in Domestic Science to enable the women and their families to have a better life. When the WI was formed here in England and Wales women took up the challenge to feed the nation and not let produce go to waste and members are still interested in these issues as one of our resolutions shows this year.

The educational aspect is what makes the WI what it is, we are not just a women’s group, although we are a group of women, might I say “Inspiring women” who want to learn new skills, make new friends but above all make a difference.

The WI plays a unique role in providing women with educational opportunities and the chance to build new skills, to take part in a wide variety of activities and to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities.

The success of the WI depends on all three parts of the organisation, the WIs, the federations and the National Federation working together and the membership subscription provides essential funding for all of our work.

To fulfill our Aims and Objects we need to ensure that every member has access to everything the WI has on offer.

I know many of you are waiting to hear what I have to say about Denman; there have been some misconceptions around. I will try to put the record straight.

Denman was bought to provide education to WI members in a safe and comfortable environment in a time when many women were unsure about travelling alone let alone staying away from home in a hotel or B&B. It still provides a haven for members and non-members to learn new skills and form lasting friendships. The campus has increased in size considerably over time and the cost of maintaining the buildings and grounds has risen accordingly.

This is the perfect opportunity for me to tell you that the NFWI Board, which includes 3 Denman Guides and a number of Denman Hosts are supporting the Save Denman Appeal led by Christine Hounslow and her team which came into being after the Denman Ambassadors Conference in November

When Christine came to the Denman Committee in January with her proposal she was given the go ahead by the NFWI Board to start a member led fund raising appeal.

We are doing all we can and as responsible trustees must look at the situation from every angle, a large deficit caused us to look once again at the financial viability of Denman.

This is not the first time Denman has struggled financially over the years.

The courses are great and with an increase in the number of brochures going out to members, with updated and new courses, during the year bookings are up, new tutors are onboard and members coming to Denman are increasing their skills and enjoying the Denman Experience.

**BUT**

The cost of maintaining the campus is increasing year on year, the planned maintenance programme has been struggling to cover the cost of general wear and tear and replacing essentials and we were frequently surprised by unexpected repairs.

The NFWI Board is funding a professional survey to verify the amount of work that would need to be done over the next 5 years to bring the campus up to reasonable standard of decoration and repair. The money from the "Save Denman Appeal" will be ring fenced for maintenance and managed according to the amount donated.

Many of you have already given generously to the appeal and I'm sure WIs and Federations will continue to have events to support Denman.

As NFWI Trustees we support Denman both as Trustees and as individual members in our own WIs and Federations. Today we have organized a bucket collection with the help of some of the Denman Ambassadors and Guides, and they will be around at lunch time and at the end of the meeting - £1.00 per person would see a substantial amount of money toward the Save Denman Appeal. If you aren't able to find a member with a bucket to give your money to then maybe you can have a collection on the coach on the way home if you would like to.

Not all members are able to or want to go to Denman, in fact only about 3% do go. The NFWI Board must also ensure that opportunities to learn in the broadest sense are available to all members should they wish to access it.

What other way is there for WI members to learn new skills and share their experiences?

3 years ago we restructured 2 of the NFWI Committees, Education and Federation Support and Membership and Training to 5 stand-alone committees - Cookery, Craft, Science and Leisure, Membership and Training allowing us to focus in more detail on what each area has to offer.

We have a newly appointed Food and Cookery Adviser, Victoria Murphy, Floral Art and Horticulture Adviser, David Martin and Clare Spender our Craft Adviser has been with us for some time now while Helen Neal co-ordinates the Science and Leisure activities. The Membership Committee is supported by Karin Gumble and Sophie Page, and Val Watson oversees the running of the Training Committee.

All these committees are chaired by a member of the Board of Trustees.

When I became a WI member and I'm sure it was the same for many of you we taught each other how to knit, crochet, make a perfect Victoria sponge. We shared our skills going into each other's homes, helping with child care while other WI Mums were able to do a federation workshop day. I'm sure we can still share our knowledge in this way but technology has made sharing and learning different.

Very soon the Cookery Committee will be launching the WI Food Club aimed at members who wish to take part in food related activities and share their love of food and recipes with others. Also on the website the ever popular food area will have some new features short skills videos, Menu of the Month, Member Recipe of the Week, all coming soon' Get yourself geared up for "Healthy Eating Week" in June 2017.

Alternatively -

Have you ever wanted to knit or stitch a spoon and have it dipped in porcelain?

The Craft Committee is working on a project with Salisbury Museum to encourage members to attend a workshop and create a spoon.

Do you remember the Kingston Project culminating in the fashion show at the Annual Meeting last year?

There will be a new project coming soon when the WI will be linking up with Norwich, University of the Arts, BA (Hons) Textiles and Manchester Metropolitan University, BA (Hons) Textile in Practice.

Again working with technology "Have a go at ...." projects have been created especially for you to download and have a go at a new craft.

So go on, download a new project and try something new.

If technology is not your area of expertise we can always print off copies and send them to you.

Look out for more “Have a go” short films - these feature simple projects that might help inspire a crafting evening with a group of friends or in your own WI.

Did any of you go to the Driving Skills Day at Wroxall Abbey, hosted by the Institute of Advanced Motorists?

Work will continue between the WI and the Institute of Advanced Motorists to bring further driving opportunities to the members.

Federations and WIs have taken to the challenge with their usual enthusiasm – events such as skydiving, popmobility, windsurfing, hula hooping and rock n’ roll dancing are all being organised for National WI Sports Week takes place on the 12 – 18 September.

Healthy Eating Week, Sports Week and knitted spoons dipped in porcelain what more does the WI offer?

We continue to offer Federations workshops in Communication Skills, IFE Training and Trustee Training also workshops for Federation Chairmen, Federation Treasurers and Membership Chairmen are held at Denman.

Federation Digital Team Leaders help WI members with all things digital from getting on the Moodle to finding out what their smart phone can do.

Find out how to create your own digital story, perhaps for your federation centenary celebrations, by using the step by step interactive course on the WI Moodle or perhaps your federation archivist would like to attend the Archivist Conference in November at Denman.

Due to popular demand, there will be four member’s open days at the NFWI office this year at the end of November and beginning of December, we really do look forward to welcoming members to WI Headquarters.

“Opportunities for All” as a new project launched in November 2015 following the success of the Inspiring Women Conferences, NFWI trustees will come to federation and WI events to share information about the work of the NFWI with the membership. There needs to be a minimum of 50 members in attendance, this might be an opportunity for one or two new WIs or federations to bring a group of new members together to find out more about the WI and what there is on offer.

All travel and accommodation expenses of NFWI trustees will be covered by the NFWI because we want you to have the opportunity to find out from the NFWI for you.

I thought you would be interested to know that since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 we have had 60,194 new members and the total number of WIs is 6,375. We now have 394 NFWI Associates, 76 new ones since January of this year and the total number of members including dual members on the MCS is 226,402

To complete the Centenary Celebrations in Wales 26 scrapbooks were submitted for judging in the very popular Centenary scrapbook competition, congratulations to all who entered.

In October seven members and two staff represented NFWI-Wales in the Cardiff Half Marathon and we were delighted that all nine finished the event with no injuries.

In November the White Ribbon 'Not in my Name' campaign was again successful and for the first time, NFWI-Wales organised a candlelight vigil.

Wales continues to work on many Public Affairs issues working alongside the Public Affairs team in London

We have 2 resolutions to discuss today and the Public Affairs team, led by our new Head of Public Affairs Emma Holland Lyndsey, continues to work on campaigns.

I know many federations are still supporting the Save the Honeybee campaign and the second National Bee Summit will be in November, we are now wanting to see the recommendations put into place for better and safer and more personalized maternity care as part of our More Midwives campaign.

Members organized over 50 workshops where they made green hearts to wear and share supporting the launch of The Climate Coalition's Show the Love campaign.

I know most of you like a bit of retail therapy and WI Enterprises have stall holders waiting to help you with this and don't forget the NFWI Raffle with a first prize of £10,000 – how many handbags could you buy with that amount of money?

Talking of money our Honorary Treasurer is ready and willing to tell you our financial position and I will talk about further developments in technology and the future of the WI later.

I hope you all enjoy the meeting, thank you.

Janice Langley

June 2016