

Llanilar WI: a Short History

Compiled in October 2010 from local records by Judy Lile

On 24 February 1925 a meeting was held to discuss the formation of a Women's Institute in Llanilar. It was proposed by Mrs Davies, Bryntirion and seconded by Miss Edwards of Rose Cottage.

It was in 1897 in Stoney Creek, Canada that the first WI came into being. In 1915 the first WI meeting in Britain was held in Llanfair Pwllgwyngyll, Anglesey.

Llanilar, was a small village in Ceredigion. Some of its residents met again in February 1925 to form a committee of twelve members. The president was Mrs Lloyd Rees, Glynwern, with Mrs Davies, Bryntirion and Miss Headley, Brynilar as vice-presidents.

In the September the committee met in the chapel schoolroom. Mrs Davies, Bryntirion had offered an empty cottage in Pentre-llyn for meetings, and it would meet on Wednesday evenings. Llanfarian WI members were to help Llanilar in the early stages. On 7 October 1925, the first meeting was held at the cottage, with twenty-three members being enrolled. Mrs Loxdale of Castle Hill sent a letter of good wishes and a cheque for one guinea.

It was decided that raffia work would be done for the forthcoming session, and weekly meetings continued for the next few years. In November 1925 a poppy day collection raised £3.9s.4d. Members were always addressed as Mrs or Miss in any written records and generally an address was included, e.g Miss Lloyd, llar Villa. When a vote of thanks was proposed it was always 'a most hearty vote of thanks'.

In April 1926 members were learning how to make cane trays and wine mats, and in the next few years, trussing a fowl and skin curing.

The first trip recorded was to Llandrindod Wells in September 1926, leaving at 8.30 a.m. 'The weather,' it was reported, 'was all that could be desired and the drive was thoroughly enjoyed. A delightful time was spent at Llandrindod Wells, where arrangements made by the secretary for the comfort of the members deserve great praise. The drive home was made in good time and all the members agreed that the jaunt was a great success in every way and look forward to having a similar outing next year'.

29 December 1926 saw the members providing a Christmas tea for fifty-two local school children. The following month at the annual meeting, Mrs Lloyd Rees was re-elected as president. In the same month the six group meetings were held, one being in Llanilar, when the Countess of Lisburne, president of the WI executive committee, addressed the six groups. She confined her talks to programmes and laid stress on the fact that too much time was devoted to handicrafts and that the programmes lacked variety. At the end of each meeting she presented a signed photograph of herself to the organiser.

On 17 June 1927, the second Conference on Libraries in Wales and Monmouthshire was held at Aberystwyth. Mrs Basil Jones spoke on WI's. A WI, she said, was not a building, neither did it mean that it possessed a building of its own. Some institutes possessed a room in a memorial hall, which they had helped to build, while others met in a village school or chapel vestry. They met regularly once a month for at least eleven months in the year. WI's were today a vital organisation in village life. Membership was open to women of every class. There was no party or

denominational distinction, and subjects leading to party or denominational friction were strictly deterred. WI's were a common meeting ground where women could become friends in the best sense of the word. WI's were also helping to develop handicrafts in the country. Institutes began twelve years ago, and she was proud of the fact that the first one was established in Wales. The movement had grown rapidly and there were now in England and Wales 3,850 institutes, the number in Wales being 290.

Snippets from the records

1927 - At a social in Carmel chapel vestry there were prizes for an impromptu speech.

December 1928 - Mr Evans, headmaster gave a talk on 'Our Village.' The evening ended by singing God Save the King.

February 1929 - A drama concert did not take place, owing to 'a terrific snowstorm and blizzard'.

March 1929 - The institute decided to close down for the winter months, but then didn't.

31 August 1929 - Annual outing. Nineteen members and eight outsiders went by charabanc to Swansea.

13 November 1929 - Seventeen members present, but several unable to come because the bridge at Glyn-wern had been washed away.

May 1930 - Extract from the Cambrian News. Llanilar WI members spent a 'delightful afternoon at Abermad' guests of Mrs Dan Roberts. Tea and games were enjoyed on the lawn in brilliant sunshine.

12 October 1931 - The institute cottage was now let to others and no officials were willing to carry on. Twelve members were present when it was decided to close down the institute.

It reopened in 1948.

9 April 1948 - A meeting was held at Castle Hill on a Friday presided over by Mrs Hugh Loxdale.

14 May - The meeting began with the singing of Jerusalem accompanied by Miss Headley on the violin.

18 June - At the meeting the monthly letter was read out, which contained an appeal for eggs for the hospital, and also for members to help with the distribution of the new ration cards.

In some meetings there was a 'social half hour' when there might be a spelling bee, community singing or games.

1952 - It was the illness of Mrs Loxdale in March 1952 which necessitated the move to hold meetings in the 'Old School' now the Llanilar Community Centre. One Friday evening in the autumn of 1952 Llanilar WI held their first meeting in the building which was then the thriving county primary school. The Old School has thus been home to the local WI for 58 years (writing in 2010).

Sometime during 1952 the Rev. T. Herbert Davies gave a talk on the history of the parish. Communion cups which are used on important occasions in Llanilar are of great historical interest. There is a tradition that one of them was used by Henry Tudor after he had passed the night at Llidiardau on his way to the Battle of Bosworth.

In 1952 at the annual meeting Mrs Berian Thomas the doctor's wife became president. She remained president until 1970.

Topics for meetings

In 1954 a local representative for a firm of vacuum cleaners gave a demonstration.

A representative of a meat extract company gave a talk and film. Samples were handed out.

Talks on cane work, history of drama, and a sponge cake competition with twenty-eight entries.

23 February 1955 - The Ystwyth group organised a handicrafts and produce exhibition in the chapel vestry. There were nine hundred exhibits with a shield for the institute with the highest marks. 1st Llanafan, 2nd Llanilar, 3rd Llanon. Over two hundred visitors attended.

13 January 1956 -. A Christmas party was held for the schoolchildren. Games, films and carol singing took place.

9 March - Aberystwyth Rural District Council housing committee approved a site for the village hall. Later this land was sold to enable the Old School to be refurbished.

2 November - 'Llanilar folk should pull together so that building of the village hall could begin as soon as possible.' urged Mr S. Glover, headmaster, at the annual meeting of the village hall committee.

31 January 1958 - The annual dinner and tenth birthday was held at the Marine Hotel in Aberystwyth

July 1960 - A demonstration by J. Rowlands butcher, Mill Street Aberystwyth, when he cut up sides of beef.

14 December 1962 - . The WI met at Castle Hill for the annual party, where whist was played and refreshments enjoyed.

January 1963 - Sixty children attended the annual Christmas party.

1 February - A travel clock was presented to Mrs Berian Thomas to mark her ten years as president.

26 March 1965 - The WI celebrated forty years at a dinner at the Bay Hotel in Aberystwyth. Mrs Thomas recalled that the institute was formed in February 1925 and held regular meetings on Wednesday evenings in a cottage in Pentre-llyn, kindly lent by the late Mrs Davies, Bryntirion. The subscription was then 2/- (two shillings a year). Llanfarian WI had been a great help during the early days of the formation.

April 1965 - Mrs Rene Evans instructed members how to make folding sewing bags, toilet bags and lambs-wool slippers.

In December carols were sung by candlelight in the chapel vestry.

A scrapbook compiled in 1998 contained the following piece by Mrs Rene Evans:

'I was born in Bolton and moved to Aberystwyth in 1939 to pursue a management career in the Cooperative Wholesale Society. I was in charge of dry goods, which meant everything except food. Before moving to Llanilar I lived at New Cross. I married Stephen in 1958 and continued to work until my daughter Llinos was born. I took in bed-and-breakfast guests at Brynawel until I went back to work, this time at Lampeter House, Aberystwyth.

I came to live in Llanilar in 1954, and when the WI resumed that September I went along with my friend Cassie. There was a good mixture of ages and I enjoyed the meetings, the demonstrations and the competitive atmosphere. The AGM was held soon afterwards and I was thrown in at the deep end when I was made secretary. I had heard about 'the institute' before this, as Llanafan WI had invited me to demonstrate dressmaking at one of their meetings. I remember there were tea hostesses and delicious food.

When I first attended Llanilar WI the weekly meetings were on a Friday, and over the years the attendance flourished, growing from thirty- eight to fifty at one period. The rallies were always held when I was at work, but after Llinos started school I was able to attend the day schools, where we made gloves, copperwork, lampshades, stitch rugs and sometimes cakes. I also remember that Margaret Williams, the rural domestic economy adviser, became so enthusiastic that she toppled into the deep freeze.

The WI has changed with the times, and I believe a big step forward was the introduction of limitation of service about thirty years ago. The president may now serve for only three years, thus continually bringing in new blood and new ideas. It is important to maintain the competitive spirit by encouraging members to take part in the various rallies and competitions. I remember when the WI helped to organize the local carnival the children were given a penny each for entering, which they then spent on food. The penny bought a bun or sandwich and drinks were free.

In 1957 I received a bursary to attend a coloured embroidery course at Denman College. It lasted from Monday to Friday and I enjoyed every minute of it. I went by train and arrived by taxi at Denman to find everyone having afternoon tea. The classrooms were in the grounds and were quite cold when it snowed on one of the days and the boiler broke down! We found a needlework shop in Oxford which seemed to sell everything and in future years this same shop supplied me with materials at Lampeter House. I returned home on the Friday and when I went to WI in the evening I was asked to give a talk on what I had learned, so there was no time to be nervous!

I have many happy memories of Llanilar WI, among them carol singing around the village and the late Will Jones, Glan-yr-afon, refusing to give us any money until he had a kiss from all the ladies; the fifties, when there were only two cars in the village, one of them belonging to Billy the Shop's father; and Mrs Rees, who always sat in the front row in the same seat, and who allowed the committee to meet in her front room while she went next door to her sister Miss Lloyd. She always had a coal fire and a warm welcome for everyone, as there has been over the years to all members at the weekly meetings at the Old School.'

The current president Judy Lile, remembers attending committee meetings at Ilar Villa, the home of Mrs Rees. We met in the small cosy front room in front of the lovely coal fire. The WI always gave Mrs Rees one or two sacks of coal at Christmas in gratitude of her kindness.

Mrs Rene Evans is now in her nineties and lives in Aberaeron.

In 1996 a national WI competition was held to make a scrapbook of your village. Prizes were four bursaries to Denman College, one for each WI producing the best book, in the North, South, East and West and Wales regions. Tregaron was the best bilingual entry in Wales, and Llanilar won the best English entry in the West of England and Wales. The winning entries were exhibited in London during the week of the annual meeting from 24 - 27 May.

The Llanilar book was edited by Mrs Berian Thomas, president of Llanilar WI. It was a collective village effort. Every member contributed either by typing, writing an article, collecting information, or by producing photographs many of which were specially taken for the competition. Many of their families also helped. The cover was made in the WI colours of red and green by Mr Manod Rees, who also designed and painted the frontispiece, depicting life centred around the church and chapel, with the river Ystwyth flowing through the village, where agriculture contrasts with rural industries. The typing was done by WI members and families, two of whom were beginners and another was a 'mum' who was restarting her typing. The printing under the photos was by Mrs Trevor Thomas. There were six hundred pages of articles and illustrations. Fifty-four different people wrote articles for the book, covering a very wide range of subjects, including twenty-two WI members who wrote about their farms, homes and gardens.

The original scrapbook is housed in the National Library of Wales. A copy is with the institute.

Miscellaneous facts

Mrs Moses (now Jean Williams) joined the WI in 1964. She and Margaret Davies are the longest serving members.

In 1966 at the Christmas Fayre teas were provided. One coke, one sandwich, one scone, cup of tea. This cost 1/6d (one shilling and sixpence)

In 1965/66 there were forty-three members of the WI

In 1967 there were fifty-two registered members.

At times the WI had area secretaries. Areas included the village, Cwm Aur and, at one time, Castle Hill. Jean Moses was the secretary for Pentre-llyn. Their job was to keep the members informed about forthcoming events. These secretaries no longer exist.

1970/71 - A new president, Mrs Trevor Thomas took over from Mrs Berian Thomas, and in that year what appears to be the highest number of members were registered - 58.

1973 The annual Christmas dinner cost £1.50p

1975 Several familiar names are on the register, amongst them, Val Blaney, Gwen Briggs, Marian Davies, Betty Cox, Judy Lile, Betty Wakelin.

1983. In the Summer Rally Llanilar were first in the Co-operative and went through to the Royal Welsh Show.

1975-1998

Presidents during the 1975-1998 period were Jean Williams, Betty Cox, Marilyn Coleman, Win Boote, Mair Jones, Jean Evans, Judy Lile, Val O'Shea, Penny Starr.

Soon after Mrs Berian Thomas finished her reign as president, limitation of service was introduced. Now, the main officers are generally elected for up to three years at any one time.

In May 1977 a special committee meeting was held to make arrangements for the carnival to be organized by the WI to celebrate the Queen's silver jubilee. This was to be on Monday 6 June when the prizes for the children were, 1st 25p, 2nd 15p, 3rd 10p.

In addition all children under twelve received 10p. All local organizations were asked to enter a float. Bad weather forced the cancellation of the procession but the carnival was very successful.

1978 the institute had darts and table-tennis teams and continued to run the village carnival. The football club took care of the sports.

1980 saw Ann Clwyd MP speaking at an open meeting run by the WI.

1983. Clive Williams, optician, gave a talk on his work in Saudi Arabia where he practised at a private eye hospital in Jeddah for two and a half years. Now in 2010 Clive is returning to Llanilar to speak about his work with Vision Aid Overseas.

In November 1983 a famine supper of soup and bread was held, and in the same month at the Christmas rally Llanilar were joint winners with Wig and District for the Miss Henry Perpetual Produce Cup, gaining the highest number of points in the individual categories.

In 1985 it was suggested that the WI should meet fortnightly or even monthly, but after some discussion meetings remained weekly. Merched y Wawr had recently begun in the village and the WI committee felt it was important that there should be no feeling of rivalry, rather friendly co-operation.

In 1986 after many years of organising the carnival it was decided that the Community Development Council should take over the running of the annual event.

The carnival had always chosen a Miss Rosebud, selected at a disco. Miss Rosebud had attendants and led the procession on her specially decorated float.

In 1987 Llanilar were winners of the Edith Henry Memorial cup at the Christmas Rally. This was awarded to the institute gaining the highest number of points in the rally.

1990. Llanilar WI were again first in the Co-operative at the Summer Rally and then third at the Royal Welsh Show.

1991. A jumble sale took place in Aberystwyth, which resulted in a profit of £116.00. This was possibly the last one to be held by the WI. A sign of the times, car boot sales began to be popular during the next few years.

In the same year Llanilar WI planted a tree in the churchyard in memory of former WI members. Initial worries about the dumping of garden waste near the tree have proved to be unfounded, for the tree is still flourishing in 2010.

1992. Subscriptions were £9.00

7 October 1995 saw the 70th anniversary dinner at the Richmond Hotel in Aberystwyth. Several former presidents attended.

1996. The highlight of the year was the journey of the scrolls, travelling through all the Ceredigion institutes, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Ceredigion Federation of WIs.

27 June - Llangwryfon WI members arrived in Llanilar by vintage bus, on a beautiful summer evening. Several of the members were dressed 1920s style. They were met by the president Judy Lile and after the scroll was handed over a very pleasant evening was spent in the lovely garden of Marilyn Coleman.

3 July saw Llanilar WI members travelling to Llanafan dressed as Land Army girls. They were following a vintage tractor owned and driven by Maurine Edwards. A great welcome was given by Llanafan members with delicious food handed out and a specially written poem for the event. Judy passed the scroll on to the Llanafan president Mrs Ruddick.

In the same year members entered an Action song in the County Eisteddfod. We sang and danced our way to joint third place. Marilyn Coleman came first in the missing letter competition.

In 1998 Llanilar produced another scrapbook!

The cover shows the meeting place of the WI, The Old School later to be known as the Community Centre. The scrapbook is divided into the months of the year and shows many photographs and mementos of the WI.

Each member contributed a pen portrait of herself and how she came to live in the area. It is fascinating to peruse the many pages, and memories come flooding back of members past and present:

The time we cleaned and painted our meeting room, our many walks, our trips, our celebrations, a visit to Denman College, our unique 'library'.

The book appears to have been made to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Llanilar WI. There is a certificate included, which was sent by NFWI congratulating us on the Golden Jubilee.

We have cause to celebrate two dates, February 1925 our original formation and April 1948 when the institute was reformed after a break of seventeen years.

As the twentieth century drew to a close we looked forward to the next century and the celebration of the millennium.

Another scrapbook.

To be continued.

Judy Lile

October 2010

The Committee in October 2010 (i.e. that for 2009/10) was made up as follows:

President:	Judy Lile
Vice presidents:	Jane Askie and Val O'Shea
Secretary:	Jennifer Horgan
Minute secretary:	Althea Tyndale
Programme secretary:	Jane Askie
Treasurer:	Marilyn Coleman
Press:	Val O'Shea
Welfare:	Janet Parry
Home Economics:	Janet Webb
Raffle and Competitions:	Pam Jennings
Sales Table:	Shirley Ferguson
Tea and refreshments:	Sian Richards
Community Development Rep:	Maurine Edwards
Gift Aid:	Jean Evans
Register:	Eirlys Jones
Librarian:	Jayne Hancock

The Register of members at this time was as follows:

**Rosalie Alexander
Jane Askie
Barbara Bartholomew
Lilwen Bevan
Val Blaney
Marilyn Coleman
Margaret Davies
Maurine Edwards
Jane Edwards
Jean Evans
Shirley Ferguson
Jayne Hancock
Jen Horgan
Sheila Jarvis
Pam Jennings
Eirlys Jones
Olivia Lewis
Judy Lile
Ann Mace
Gillian Manton
Brenda Mead
Shirley Newton
Val O'Shea
Janet Parry
Margaret Rees
Sian Richards
Althea Tyndale
Cynthia Wainwright
Janet Webb
Ethel Williams
Jean Williams**