**Report of the NFWI Annual Meeting 8 June 2021**

It was an honour and a privilege to be a Link Delegate for this year’s Annual Meeting (AM) – my 1st time as a delegate. I had my unique access code to log in to the 1st ever virtual AM – and there she was - Lynne Stubbings, NFWI Chair, with her team at the Royal Society of Arts in London welcoming 2,500 members and guests to the meeting. Two electronic polls in (voting on the Standing Orders and Constitutional Resolutions) we were all feeling confident that things were going well on the virtual platform when a global internet hitch stopped the live streaming! Not to fear, as the professional company employed for the meeting signposted us to watch the live stream on You Tube and we all sat back to listen to HRH The Countess of Wessex.

The Countess is the proud supporter of 70 charities and plays a major role in supporting HM The Queen and she reported that the Royal Family still go into fits of giggles when they recall the cutting of the WI Centenary Cake. But it was of her mother, Mary, which the Countess started her talk with, emphasising the importance of family and friendship that her mother nurtured in her children. Apparently, there was also a “Cakegate” moment in the family when her mother served up a “light fudge cake” in which a hammer was used to get a knife into the cake, where it got stuck and eventually broke the plate! The Countess spoke eloquently and passionately about gender equality; sexual violence on women in conflicts; and fairness. She concluded her talk with asking us, “To be proud – the WI is full of strong women who are resilient, resourceful and reliable.”

Retiring Hon. Treasurer, Julia Roberts then gave us a very clear and concise overview of our Finances. The total income for the year decreased by 29.85% but with robust reserves we should be able to weather the storm of Covid.

Dame Cressida Dick, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service - the first woman to hold this post - was the next speaker and proved to be a very engaging speaker. She emphasised that perhaps like the WI, the stereotypes of the police force are very far from the truth and her theme was keeping women and girls safe and how the police can help. Although the “police are the public and the public are the police” is one of her favourite mantras.

Mr John Butler, Consultant Gynaecological Surgeon at The Royal Marsden Hospital, supported the Public Affairs Resolution and talked about his work with “inspiring women” who have ovarian cancer. He also informed us of recent surveys that indicated the barriers we have for low cancer treatment success in this country. Whereas GPs in the UK would only refer 40% of patients, GPs in Canada presented with patients displaying the same symptoms, would refer 60% of them.

The Rt. Hon the Baroness Hale of Richmond was our last speaker of the day and through the story of her childhood and her career in the law she gave us an insight into her life as the first woman Law Lord and President of the Supreme Court, until she retired. Baroness Hale attended a state school and was accepted into Cambridge University to study law. In her year, there were 6 women and 110 men and she graduated top of her class. She pleaded the case for diversity in the Judiciary system and thought that motherhood, rather than gender, holds women back in a career in law.

There followed some heartfelt thanks given to Lynne Stubbings as she retires from her role as NFWI Chair. Although it was not the final year that anyone would have wished for her, when the storm hit, she was the woman you wanted at the helm.

Finally, Lynne Stubbings spoke of the future of the WI with its 5 year Strategy Plan and the need to be BOLD. We shouldn’t be a “best kept secret” but we should be loud and proud of the WI, the largest women’s organisation in the UK.

In the end the 2021 AM proved to be a “Great Day In” with like-minded and inspiring women but I did miss the company of fellow WI members from across our county. Perhaps next year we can get together in person in Liverpool for the 2022 AM. Fingers crossed!

**Sue Hamilton (Towcester Evening WI)**