Good evening everyone and once again welcome.

I am going to get this over and done with before anything else as I may not be able to do it at the end!!! At my first AGM as Chairman I ended by saying that behind every great woman is a Dennis. The next day one of the Board members came to me and said she wished she had a Dennis! I would like to thank all of my friends on the Board of Trustees, the staff at WI House, subcommittee members and all the WIs and their members who have been so supportive over the past year. I couldn’t have done it without you!

I have already mentioned our two new WIs, Bradden and Guilsborough however I would like to make a special mention of Blakesley-cum-Woodend WI. They are one of our newest WIs and have taken part in both the Pauline Duff trophy and the Challenge Trophy this year – I am afraid at this moment I cannot tell you the results but they have very quickly become involved with our WI family and I hope their enthusiasm rubs off on all our other WIs. We are here for you, so please be there for us!

This coming year is a very special one for our Federation and also for six of our WIs as we all celebrate our Centenary. In no particular order they are Brackley, Badby and Fawsley, Clipston, Hargrave, Brigstock and Wootton. We are working very hard to organise all our events and we hope that you will support and enjoy.

I have heard that at least one or two of our WIs are organising coaches to take their members, friends, children and grandchildren to Althorp for our summer picnic – we can only hope for good weather and thank everyone at Althorp for all their help.

We are also of course planning for our Centenary Federation AGM which will be on the 7th November 2018 and which we have decided will be an all day meeting at the Lighthouse Theatre in Kettering.

Of course there will be cake – and our bakers will be turning their ovens on shortly!!!!

Many of us have the same reasons for joining the WI, friends are a key influence, outings and social groups important and WIs want to evolve and attract new members.

The strength of the WI comes from its common purpose, improving the lives of women.

Is there a woman in the world who doesn’t want to improve her life style, make a better life for her family or learn something new?

I’m sure we all learn something new every day and also at our own WI meetings.

The origins of the WI are in educating women, thus our charitable status which is precious and shouldn’t be put in jeopardy.

Maybe the word education puts people off joining the WI but surely part of being a woman is our natural curiosity. How often do you put your finger in something just for a taste? Jam, soup or even touched wet paint – even though the sign is there? Curiosity or a need to experience new things. We all need to experience new things and sometimes just the title of a talk at your WI can be off putting – but to me if the speaker is enthusiastic about their subject then it is instantly more interesting.

The situation at Denman continues to improve and the appeal is slowly creeping towards that first half million – as at 19th October the fund was £469,995.53. Chris Farmer, our Denman Ambassador, has been working so hard with the fabric sales and I know some of our members have been helping either with the “bag and tag” days or going to Denman to buy. We are so close here to Denman – I don’t get the opportunity to go as often as I would like but as I drive through the gates I am always uplifted by the view, the atmosphere and probably the supply of drink in the bar!!! Not forgetting the number and variety of courses. Chris did ask me to remind you about holding a BIG raffle at your November meetings.

We are always looking for new members to join us on our sub committees and in your November newsletter you will find a letter from me with details of all the different committees we have in the Federation. They work incredibly hard to put on all the different courses and trips and would very much appreciate some new blood – please read this out in your WIs – there is also a nomination form – and it is for your members to try – there is no obligation.

We were very hopeful in the Federation of receiving funding to start playing Walking Netball – a game for any age – if you can walk and throw and catch a ball then you can play. However I have recently heard that the Netball England sponsorship was turned down as there was a restriction on inactive women over 55. I am sure there will be a way eventually – I really enjoyed the one time I played!!

I look forward to meeting some of you again at the Christmas Craft Fair at the Guildhall on the 18th November, at our “social” on the 29th November – I am afraid we could only accommodate Presidents and Secretaries – and also at the coffee morning on the 8th December.

Finally, I thank you all for your friendship and support because without YOU there would be no WI, and no Federation and you are all the inspiring women making the WI what you want it to be.