**The first ten years – 1917 -1927**

The first WI meeting was held at Southwell in May and addressed by Mrs Madge Watt who, whilst staying with a relative, thought it an ideal place for a WI. The Hon Mary Handford, was elected the President at their first meeting in June 1917. East Bridgford was the next WI to meet in September and were formed in December 1917. By **early 1918** there were 8 more WIs together with the County Federation holding a meeting in February, the **Hon Mary Handford**, being elected the first Chairman. The first Council meeting was held in October 1918 in the Land Army rest rooms. Cookery lectures, demonstrations etc, were available from the Education Committee and a Marketing scheme operated by the Notts Fruit and Vegetable Society urged members to learn to pack and grade. An AGM resolution calling for the formation of co-operative jam factories making it possible the following year to undertake Jam-making. It’s easy to forget that all the work being done on lectures, was against a background of wartime misery, casualty lists and shortages much worse than the Second World War. One of the first actions of **East Bridgford WI** was to establish a soup kitchen for children and old people - no benefits in 1918! **In 1919**, County held their 1st Exhibition (Show) with demonstrations of fruit canning, produce classes including cakes, bread, cheese and eggs. Craft classes included home-cured skins, rabbit and mole and articles such as hats, gloves and mats made from them. It was a great success and was repeated annually for many years. We have a Certificate from 1923 in our archives. The first Voluntary County Organisers began (now WIAs) with them attending a VCO school. **1920** saw the formation of 9 more WIs and official notepaper was ordered, the help of a typist/clerk was sanctioned. **There were 29 WIs by 1923 with a membership of 1,700** and the volume of work was rapidly increasing for the County and a part-time paid, secretary, **Miss Barbara Marriot** was appointed. The WIs were having Jumble sales to raise money for halls and crockery, one repainted the village hut, one started a library, 3 were helping to maintain the village nurse, 3 helped at the hospital. All had classes in a wide range of activities including poultry keeping, skin-curing to cobbling. It is to be remembered that WIs were restricted to the formation in villages of under 4,000 people and could not form in the town or city. **By 1925** there were **34 WIs**. A **County Rally** took place at **Epperstone in 1927**, it was the first of many to be held. There were choral and dramatic competitions, folk dancing and a pageant of six episodes of local history. Edwinstowe WI performed ‘The Outlaws of Sherwood Forest’ with **Lady Sibell Argles (County Chairman, 1931 -1954)** as Maid Marian. There was a craft exhibition, stalls and sideshows and music for the pageant. The community activities of the WIs in 1927 are too long to quote as is the subjects of lectures available. We ended the first ten years with **35 WIs**. A great deal had been achieved in 10 years. **For the first- time women, from all classes, were brought together, were able to enjoy learning and to have some fun, perhaps something that had not been normal in their daily lives before**.