2018 NFWI ANNUAL MEETING

MOTORPOINT ARENA CARDIFF WEDNESDAY JUNE 6TH

Didn’t we have a lovely time the day we went to Cardiff! (Hum tune)

Eight of us boarded the coach at 9am in Kettering and by the time we reached Brackley there were 53 of us. By then it was nearly time for the Service Station stop where everybody could meet and greet those who had got on at the other 3 stops. The mood was cheerful and the weather improved as the journey progressed. We had an uneventful journey to Stow on the Wold with much laughter and tales of our own WIs. Paul our driver announced we had a whole 2 hours to eat and shop in this beautiful Cotswold town. We did as instructed!! Eating places were busy and Suffolk federation were there too, also breaking their journey. We arrived at our hotel in Cheltenham, late afternoon, where we swam, walked in the grounds or drank tea before it was time to meet in the bar before dinner. Those who were delegates had their voting instructions to peruse and those like me who were observers headed straight to the dinner table. Our hardworking trustees then spread themselves among us and much laughter was ringing out across the room.

The next morning we had breakfast at 6.30am before making our way to Cardiff. We arrived in good time and queued for the doors to open. It was a bright sunny day. Much camaraderie as other counties joined the orderly queue. There were stalls to browse before finding your seats. Everybody was friendly and chatty as all were WI members with a common purpose. Not sure of numbers but the arena was full, indicating the huge interest in the Annual meeting with many, many people being there at their own expense.

The stage was decorated with white purple and green flower arrangements and the banners headlining “Inspiring Women”. At 10.30 Lynne Stubbings NFWI chair welcomed us to Wales. Then Jerusalem rang out loud and clear. Always a stirring sound when sung by a large audience.

Lynne reminded us that as we entered 103 years of WI, that it was 100 years since the first resolution. Later on in the day there was a very interesting presentation on many of the previous resolutions. In the last 100 years WI has passed over 400 resolutions and has achieved change on issues that affect women and their communities. She also spoke of it being 100 years since some women got the vote and 90 years since women got the vote on equal terms with men. It was good to be reminded of previous campaigns and how often the WI were speaking up long before other organisations. 220, 000 women is not a quiet voice!

There was only one resolution this year on the subject of Mental Health. Debate indicated many people thought it was incredibly important but there were some reservations on how it could be actioned. Many parts of the resolution seemed unclear but even if it gets us talking about mental health more openly we will have achieved something. As with previous resolutions however, once they are voted in innovative ways are found of progressing. Having had a bad press from a certain newspaper earlier this year I cannot imagine what they would have made of a no vote. The voting this year was non controversial compared to other years. There was a very convincing expert speaker in support of the motion but despite an extensive search, NFWI had been unable to find an expert to vote against. Several delegates from the floor spoke in favour and none spoke against. It was fairly obvious as voting cards were passed to the tellers that this resolution was going through. When the result was announced it was 98% in favour. 5,945 in favour and against 103.

Membership is up and new WIs are being formed. We were also given a report on finances and Denman but others will report more fully on that I am sure through the newsletter and WI Life.

The keynote speaker for the morning was Dame Stella Rimington, former Director General of MI5 and bestselling author. She spoke about being a woman in a field dominated by men and at the height of the cold war. In fact she shared the newspaper headline on the day she was appointed. “Housewife becomes head of MI5!” An inspirational speaker.

It was soon lunchtime and most people headed into the Cardiff sunshine. I joined some other WI members for a ride on the Cardiff Carousel. Many onlookers were rather bemused by women of a certain age riding on a merry go round. The attendant was quite flummoxed when the ride stopped and we shouted “More” He obliged and we had a second turn.

It was then time for the afternoon session with Huw Edwards journalist, presenter and newsreader. He gave an informative and interesting speech and went off his prepared speech to make it relevant to things he had heard earlier about the campaigning history of the WI. He said he normally broadcasts on BBC to millions but was a bit nervous facing the WI and described it as coming into the lion’s den compared to commentating on the Royal wedding. He had told his elderly mother he was speaking to us and her retort was, “Are you bonkers?”

He is certainly aware that the WI is “a force to be reckoned with” In fact earlier in the day Lynne Stubbings had reminded us that Frank Field MP when discussing food poverty said things would get done with the WI involved.

The conference finished how it had started with Jerusalem, and then the anthems, God Save The Queen and Land Of My Fathers. Lovely to hear the Welsh Anthem being sung with a large contingent of Welsh members present while the rest of us tried really hard with a phonic version. Most of the speakers greeted in Welsh and some like Huw Edwards spoke some sentences in Welsh. It was a good reminder of where the first WI was formed on these shores when it came here from Canada.

Due to very heavy traffic and a Beyonce concert it was past 6pm when we left the Motorpoint Arena. A long journey back and the final group left the coach in Kettering at 10.30pm. It had been a wonderful two days. It is many years since I had been to the Annual Meeting and I loved every minute. I urge you to try and go at least once. So wonderful to meet WI members from all over the country and to hear their stories and meet members from your own county.

At our final stop on the service station on the way home Sue Kendall our County chairman was seen heading towards the Leicestershire and Rutland coach. We thought she had given up on us and was defecting but we think she spotted somebody she knew!!

I would like to thank members of the Federation for their organisation, as although we had fun and laughter a great deal of hard work goes into this event. You will no doubt hear more when your delegate reports back to your WI.

***Steph Beckett***

***Brigstock WI***

***Geddington WI***