



## LEVINGTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE - REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISHES MEETING Wednesday, 21 April 2021

The Covid crisis has obviously hit us all very hard. As President of our village WI, I felt the situation seemed very odd because, usually in times of National crisis, the WI comes to the fore & leads the way in helping others but this time, because of the age demographic of our membership, most of us were at risk ourselves & could not do as much as we would like to have done to help the community. But many members who could, did just that & many made gowns & masks for the NHS. Some volunteered to act as helpers in other ways such as for people in the village who were more vulnerable & needed shopping or prescriptions to fetch etc. It made me feel both proud & humble.

We were able to hold our normal monthly meetings from January to March 2020 but then, of course, life became very different when the country went into lockdown and all meetings were suspended. Even then we had little idea how serious the disease could be &, less still, the impact it would have on all our lives.

At this unprecedented time I made it my mission to ensure that our members did not feel too alone & mentally isolated. Our wonderful committee regularly telephoned members, concentrating at first on those who lived alone or who did not have email. We introduced weekly Skype chats which, after initial and amusing teething difficulties, became a regular feature until the summer. I also started regular newsletters to keep members in touch with happenings (13 in all to date). These were not just WI-related news but also included useful information such as how to make face masks or gowns or which local firms were doing home deliveries. Chatty items about what members were getting up to in lockdown were a popular feature.

The May 2020 edition was dedicated to some older members' memories of VE Day as we commemorated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Re-reading it now I see I made the comment that we were now fighting a present-day war against Covid. How apt that turned out to be as the situation continued to deteriorate.

The newsletters & other tip-bits of information were emailed to members but I was adamant throughout that those members without access to the internet should not miss out on our news & thus printed copies of the newsletters & other important items were hand-delivered to all those who do not have access to email. It has been encouraging to hear that lots of non-WI members have enjoyed reading these on the excellent village website set up to inform villagers of developments & local news during the pandemic.

We are a very active WI & were used to enjoying craft workshops, pub lunches & other outings. All these activities had to be cancelled but when the Covid rules allowed, we met in groups of six in members' gardens. The warm weather helped make these very successful.

In early September we were discussing tentative plans to begin regular meetings once again. Unfortunately the situation deteriorated and the Government ruled that we were unable to meet in groups larger than six. Hence all thought of 'real' meetings were suspended once again. At that time we took the decision to start holding virtual meetings via the Zoom platform & looked for speakers who could cope with this relatively new format. The pandemic has seen a huge growth in our IT expertise & I am very proud of how well our members have adapted to new technologies. Most of us had not even heard of Zoom let alone used it! We now have regular monthly meetings using this platform. We obtained a grant to fund the £140 cost of an annual licence to use Zoom.

On three occasions over the past year we have delivered modest gifts to all members to remind them that the committee were thinking about them. The gifts included items such as quizzes, chocolates, a miniature bottle of wine at Christmas &, most recently, a bunch of daffodils & a creme egg at Easter.

2020 closed with the welcome news that vaccines were being distributed &, thankfully, at the time of writing, the 'Roadmap out of Covid restrictions' looks as if life may return to what will probably be a 'new normal' in June 2021.

This will be particularly welcome for us as 2021 is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our formation & we have planned a long list of activities to mark the birthday, including a picnic on Church Field; a garden party; a car treasure hunt; 10 pin bowling; a bonfire party & craft workshops. These are all in addition to our usual monthly meetings when we generally have a speaker on all sorts of subjects.

The National WI organisation has given members a 3-month extension to their 2020 membership meaning that the renewal date is now 1 April. I am pleased to say that all but 3 of our members have renewed this month meaning our current membership now stands at 32. It is worth mentioning that 14 of these do not live in Levington or Stratton Hall & come from the surrounding area. They have joined after hearing of our friendly group or after trying but not enjoying other local WIs. However, we know that several newcomers have moved into the parishes &, once we are able to meet again face to face, we hope that a few new residents will join our friendly active group.

*Marian Rose – a proud President of Levington WI*