



LEVINGTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE - REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISHES MEETING Wednesday 18 May 2022

I begin by giving my apologies for being unable to attend this Annual Parishes Meeting in person but I have asked Pat Pryke to present this report on my behalf – a *very* able substitute!

In my 2021 report I spoke of looking forward to life returning to a 'new normal' after the dreadful pandemic which had had such an effect on organisations, such as the WI. However, Government restrictions meant that, for the first 6 months of 2021, we had to continue to hold our monthly meetings via the Zoom platform. By this time, we were all old hands at what had been a completely new way of 'meeting'!

During this time, when weather allowed, several members hosted coffee mornings or afternoon tea for the then permitted 6 people. Some also gathered for walks around the area. Regular newsletters continued until June.

2021 was our 60th birthday year &, to mark the year, our wonderfully active Committee arranged several extra events beyond our usual monthly meetings. The first of these was a picnic in Church Field, held on a lovely afternoon in June. This was the first time more than 6 of us had been allowed to meet together, even outside, & thus was a very special occasion. Other events included a 10-pin bowling evening & a very successful bonfire party.

But for many the highlight of the year was a garden party in July to celebrate our birthday. The Covid rules meant we were limited in numbers but were still able to accommodate everyone who was free to attend. Even the summer showers did not dampen the fun & enthusiasm we all felt at being able to meet together once again. We enjoyed dancing & singing along to the Colneis Singers who had added 'Jerusalem', the WI anthem, to their repertoire for the occasion. One of my favourite photographs of this event is of an ice bath of several bottles of Prosecco but with the inevitable bottle of hand sanitizer alongside. Surely a sign of the times if ever there was one!

By September we were able to resume meeting in the Village Hall, albeit with careful Covid protocols in place. Monthly meetings continued for the rest of 2021.

In January 2022 we were due to hold a party evening – our traditional birthday meeting. Unfortunately, the Covid infection rate was very high at the time & we made the reluctant decision to cancel the evening. Since then, we have been able to continue our meetings under our 'new normal' procedures (which means I now start each meeting reminding members of our Covid protocols such as social distancing etc). Another instance of how normal life has changed for the WI.

At most monthly meetings we have a speaker – chosen to provide a variety of topics throughout the year. A particular favourite this year was the sculptor Sean Hedges-Quinn. With an entertaining manner, he took us through the meticulous stages of creating a statue. Other speakers have included subjects as diverse as wildlife photography; cooking with a wok & medical detection dogs. We have also dedicated meetings to WI campaigns to highlight awareness of ovarian cancer & autism in women & girls. Among our other 'extra-curricular' activities include outings to the theatre & cinema; walks; afternoon teas; pub lunches & various craft workshops. I hope this illustrates the wide range of activities our

members can enjoy. Someone recently said to me that the WI organisation is widely misunderstood – nationally as well as locally. There is a perception that WI ladies spend their time making jam & singing Jerusalem while wearing knitted twinsets & pearls. Anyone who comes along to any of our meetings will quickly see that this is far from the case. These days you are more likely to see us in jeans & T-shirts, having a laugh about the latest Tik-Tok video!

Having celebrated our 60th birthday in 2021, this year we will be holding our 600th meeting. It so happens that this will be in June when we will also be marking the Queen's Platinum Jubilee thus we will have a double celebration. No doubt Prosecco will appear on tables once again!

I am feel privileged to have been asked to light the beacon as part of the villages' Jubilee celebrations, an honour I am hugely proud to accept on behalf of our WI.

Our membership continues to thrive & I am proud to report that we currently have 35 members including 3 new ladies who have joined us very recently. It is worth adding that 15 of these live outside the parishes – members who enjoy our range of activities & the friendly nature of our WI. This number holds up very well at a time when many small village Wis are closing – often through lack of members willing to become officers of the Committee. This is also a challenge for us but we hope that by welcoming new (& younger!) members they will, in time, feel able to take a turn on our active Committee.

Sadly, we recently lost Pat Owen – a dearly loved member. Pat was our President for over 26 years (in two stints), from shortly after she moved to the village until 2012. She remained a fully paid up & enthusiastic member despite being unable to attend any functions in recent years & always enjoyed hearing about what we got up to. At her funeral, just yesterday, Jerusalem was, of course, one of the hymns she had chosen. Hearing this resounding round our lovely Church, with so many past & present members in attendance, brought on tears for many of us. She will be greatly missed by us all.

Marian Rose
President, Levington WI