



## LEVINGTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE - REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISHES MEETING 2024

We continue to be an active WI with a current membership of 33. This is slightly down on last year but still makes us easily the best-supported village organisation. Although each WI in the UK follows a similar a pattern, each one has a different 'vibe' and we have attracted several members who live outside the village, saying they just enjoy being part of our friendly group. We also have our own Facebook page with an amazing 421 people who have 'liked' our posts. These are from all over the country and an indication that many other WI ladies are interested in what we get up to.

As well as being part of the National WI organisation, each WI is affiliated to a County Federation – Suffolk East in our case. This affiliation is helpful in many ways including hosting a website for us and offering advice as well as arranging events & outings which may not be viable for individual WI's. The guidance is useful in the modern age as we struggle to comply with things such as risk assessments and making decisions on whether we will accept trans-gender members (!). Incidentally, our own WI has decided that anyone living as a woman is entitled to join us, regardless of their sex at birth.

As a rule, we meet in the Village Hall, at 7:30, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month. Speakers on a variety of subjects are booked to entertain and educate us & we make an effort to choose topics which offer something of interest to everyone. Over the past year our regular meetings have included learning sign language; police case histories; indoor kurling; U3A and cooking for Christmas. We also enjoyed hearing about the fascinating Sound Therapy classes which our own Filomena offers and the beautiful quilts which Mai-Britt Axelson makes. A recent meeting was special as we welcomed Animal World – a mobile petting zoo. They brought along several unusual animals many of which we could hold. As well as a tortoise and gorgeously soft lop-eared rabbits, we met more exotic creatures including a bearded dragon; a salamander; a gecko; a blue-tongued skink (a type of lizard) and a sugar glider which is a like a tiny bush baby. We learned a lot about these well cared for animals and their natural habitat.

In the summer we enjoyed a garden party at my house with a cream tea. As we danced on the lawn to our favourite group, the Colneis Singers, I couldn't help thinking how different we are from the outdated vision of the typical WI lady! We are no longer a 'jam & Jerusalem' group and more likely to turn up in a T-shirt & jeans than in tweeds & woolen twinsets! Anyone who knows our Filomena could hardly describe her as old fashioned & she adores being a part of the WI & often says she wishes she had joined years ago! This old fashioned view of the WI is a definite hindrance when trying to attract new members. I recently helped 'man' a WI stand at the Felixstowe Pensioners' fair arranged by Therese Coffey MP. I found it surprising how many women who visited the stand did not appreciate what the WI can offer these days. It is a great way to make friends and provides an excellent support group for those who may need this. Members like being able to get together for our regular pub lunches, walks, or trips to the theatre or concerts & craft workshops.

I am proud to be the current President of such a successful WI but, in common with many clubs, we struggle to find new officers of the Committee. Several WI's are closing as they cannot fill the roles of President, Secretary or Treasurer. This is a real worry for us as those of us in these required jobs cannot go on forever. If we fail to fill these roles at the Annual Meeting in November we will be forced to close down. I would hate to see this happen on my watch & this is not scaremongering but a very real possibility which our members need to acknowledge.

On a happier note, in June, we will be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of our dear May Miles, who has been a member of our WI since its start in 1961! May is held in such affection by all our members that we are having a special party evening for her with the Colneis Singers who will entertain with songs from her very long life.