



# Cog in the Tree

## West Midlands Federation of Women's Institutes.



### Words from the Chair



December & January 2024/5



This will be the last edition of the COG until after the New Year. It seems very strange to be writing this and still November! The clocks went back at the end of October and I spent the next morning going round the house altering all the clocks and the timers for the table lamps. The trees are at their best with their change to Autumn colours. The ground is a carpet of brown, red and orange leaves and it is a constant battle with the elements to sweep them all up. One more cut for the lawn, the final tidy of the garden and then mother nature can take a rest and so can I!

By the time you are reading this Halloween, Diwali and Bonfire Night will have been celebrated and there will have been numerous Remembrance Day Services at the Cenotaph, the Royal Albert Hall, the Memorial Arboretum and other venues around the country and the world. I know that many members will have been making Poppies, the symbol of Remembrance. They will have been used to create wreathes, toppers and garlands to be placed at War Memorials, on Post-boxes and at Railway Stations throughout the County and for members of your own WI to wear.

This year at our AGM we were fortunate to have as our Speaker Karl Hinett who saw active service in Iraq. Karl's was a remarkable story of resilience. The First World War was supposed to be the war to end all wars but you only have to look at all the names on the walls at the National Memorial Arboretum to realise how many more since 1945 have been to war and lost their lives. Fortunately, Karl survived his active service.

By the end of November several members will have enjoyed a visit to Waddesdon Manor and as we head into December, we are looking forward to our Christmas Celebration at St Martins in the Bullring on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December at 11am and hope that you will join us. During December many of you will be holding Christmas Celebrations before you embark on your own family celebrations, which I hope many of you will enjoy. Before we know it, we will be thinking of New Year celebrations and then it will be 2025!!!

Our theme for 2024 has been "Inspiration" and as we look back it has been a very memorable year with all our WIs participating in the true spirit of the WI. What will 2025 bring? Hopefully another year of fun and friendship with a group of inspiring women who are part of the wider WI family.

It only remains for me to say "Thank you" to all of you for your support over the last 12 months and to wish you all on behalf of myself and the Board Trustees a ***Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!***

Cathryn

### In this COG

Your WI News	P2
200 Club	P2
Events	P5
Waddesdon	P6
Short Story	P7
Trustees Challenge	P8
Arts & Activities	P9
Public Affairs	P10



## Your WI News

### Four Oaks WI

It was 'Back to School' at our recent meeting as Kath Reynolds gave a talk entitled 'Gymslips and Chalkboards' with a table full of childhood memories, such as ink bottles, annuals, Ladybird books, Janet and John, carbolic soap and a satchel.

With projected images, Kath reminded us that we went to school in all weathers. Girls wore 'hand me downs', knitted clothing, navy tunics, liberty bodices and big blue knickers with pockets. Kath quoted funny stories on how the elastic would always break at the wrong time! She reminded us that girls wore blazers and boaters and a satchel, containing homework, a jam sandwich and during WWII a gas mask. We were shown images of children wearing gas masks during drills.

The school bell rang and all lined up to go in, greeted with the smells of cabbage, carbolic soap, rancid milk and chalk. There were images of old radiators, coat pegs with names or pictures and cloakrooms. She reminisced on gloves held together with string and classrooms with lift up wooden desks, ink wells and compass point scratches! Kath held up an empty 'writing fluid' bottle and some nib pens. Rulers with inked blotting paper were often used to hit teachers from behind and Kath said that one teacher even attached a pair of wing mirrors either side of his blackboard, so he could see whom was taking aim! A bell, ruler, cane and slipper were on the teacher's desk. In Walsall a strap was used. Girls were punished more for talking with writing lines or detention used as punishment. Kath said that in WWII left-handed pupils were not allowed to use their left hand. The ultimate punishment was to be sent to the headmaster's office for the cane, which in some cases was brutal. School milk was delivered at 5.30am and left in the open till 10.30am, which meant it froze in the winter or went off in the summer. Milk monitors carried and distributed the bottles and straws. Pupils all stood up for morning assembly, where hands and shoes were inspected. Prayers and hymns were sung such as "All things bright and beautiful" and "We plough the fields and scatter." We were all encouraged to sing as Kath played the music.

Reading, writing and arithmetic comprised of poetry such as the Owl and the Pussycat, Janet and John, Dick and Jane and Ladybird Peter and Jane books. The Ladybird books were well thought and reliable including histories such as 'Nelson' and 'The life of a Policeman'. We were also shown Enid Blyton books, Rupert Bear and comics such as Beano, Dandy and Eagle. In WWII girls wrote with chalk and a slate, until pencils came along. It was noted that the sharpener was always on the teacher's desk. Arithmetic consisted of times tables, logarithms and weights and measures. Geography was the British Empire and every girl learnt domestic science. Netball, hockey, rounders and PE were done in pumps, knickers and vest. House groups existed and story time fairy stories and a song ended the day. A good interactive talk of school days gone by with some naughty exploits of members school days revealed!



**200 CLUB £10 WINNER**

**OCTOBER DRAW**

**Theresa Cousins**

**Of**

**Heart of England WI**



## Bournville WI



Bournville WI invited Helen Taylor to talk about women in policing. We learned of many firsts for women; of Evelyn Miles, oldest serving policewoman who retired at 77, who initially joined as a matron but became a uniformed officer in 1917, eventually managing the uniformed women's police dept. Also of Rebecca Lipscombe, first female officer, both women had previously been unmarried mothers, which for the time shows enormous strength and resilience to have attained such positions. In 1974, Pauline Campbell-



Moss was the first black female officer in the service, joining at just 17.

Jeryl Stone, NFWI Chair also joined the meeting as guest, and highlighted the lotto, and positive ways to engage members.

The Bournville Autumn Fair was a great success, thanks to all those who supported it. Stalls of plants, cards, cakes and crafts helped to raise money for new equipment.



## Castle Bromwich WI



It is with great sadness to report that our lovely President, **Pat Smith** passed away on 2nd August 2024. She is greatly missed by all her friends at Castle Bromwich Women's Institute. Pat joined

the WI in 2013 and became president in 2014. A lovely photo doing one of her favourite things (eating cake and drinking tea). RIP Pat.

**Marion Rous, Secretary, CBWI**

## Solihull WI

Solihull WI are sad to announce the death of our President **Jean Jones**.

Jean has been a stalwart of our WI and will be greatly missed by all our members.

## Apologies to Silhill WI

Last month we incorrectly spelt the name of the Trustee's Trophy winner, it should have read Ruth Iles of Silhill WI.

Their post box topper was also incorrect attributed to Solihull, instead of Silhill.



## Hobbs Moat WI

This month we share a poem written by our crafts co-ordinator

**Eve Hutty**  
(front right) a very creative and talented lady who inspires us to try new things.



*Meeting night, let's see what it sends  
Paying our subs,  
seeing our friends  
Some in the kitchen  
putting out drinks  
More at the door  
chatting, me thinks.*

*What's in the raffle? Or on the sales table?*

*Let's buy a ticket or more if I'm able.*

*Chairs to put out where shall we sit?*

*I want a good view but stand for a bit.*



*Is it a speaker or playing a game  
Craft or activity, it will entertain.  
News of a trip or a campaign to help out  
Competition to enter, or quiz or darts bout.*

*New things to try or old favourites bring smiles*

*It's going to be fun and start in a while.*

*Sometimes, there's forms or decisions to make*

*More often there's biscuits and tea, maybe cake.*

*New ladies joining, regulars to see*

*I wonder if all are as excited as me.*

*It's good to meet up and money can't buy,*

*The fun and the laughs at our WI.*

**Eve Hutty**

Article

**Pamela Blattner**

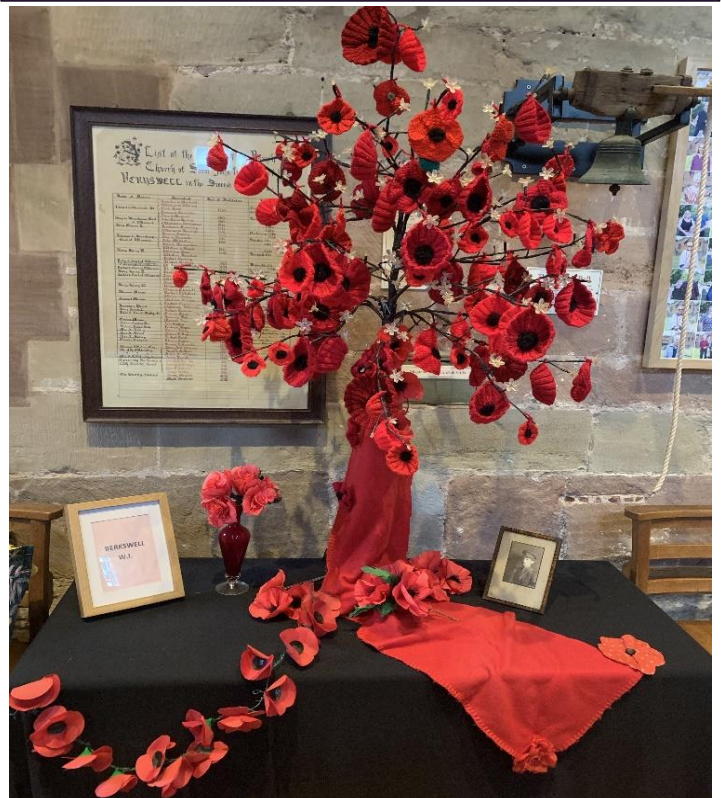


## Mere Green WI

After an inspiring weaving demonstration and talk from Ruth Sprague of Illuminating Weaves at our meeting, some members decided to try their hand at weaving. **Sue Phillips**



## Berkswell WI



The Poppy Tree in Berkswell Church for Remembrance Sunday decorated with knitted and crocheted poppies made by members of Berkswell WI.

**Pamela Griffiths**

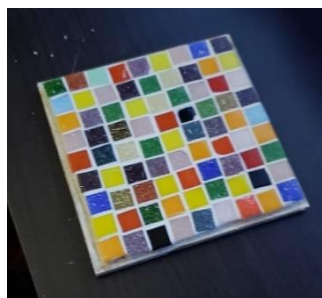
**President Berkswell WI**



## Balsall Heath & Moseley WI



BH&M spent a meditative session creating mosaic tiles. We glued mini tiles to plywood squares before grouting, producing lots of creative designs. Right is Lisa's work in progress, and below is



Pauline's completed tile. We all found it an engrossing and mindful task, whilst also munching a fabulous selection of home-made cakes, cheesy scones and flapjacks.



On December 1st we will be providing refreshments at Moseley Exchange's Winter Arts Fair, Behind the Post Office, Moseley Village, B13 8JP – Free Entry.

We will also have a stall at ANAWIM's Christmas Fayre, the charity that supports women in crisis, on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 10am -1pm at 228 Mary St, B12 9RJ. Pop in before the Christmas Celebration in Town.

**Lisa Blackburn**

## Knowle WI



Knowle WI enjoying a session of 'Chair Pilates' at their November meeting. **Stephanie Withers.**

## Great Barr WI



Great Barr WI been busy knitting a "hug of teddies" to be donated to various organisations ready to be handed out to children who have experienced traumatic events in their lives.

**Elaine Williams – Media Officer**

## Forthcoming Events

07/12/24 - Christmas Celebration at St Martins  
02/03/25 - Let's Dance launch.  
10/05/25 - County Show, Aldridge Church Hall



Don't forget to follow us on Facebook for regular news, posts and updates.

<https://www.facebook.com/WMFwi>



## WMFWI at Waddesdon Manor



Members from across the Midlands joined the WMFWI trip to Waddesdon Manor on a bright, cold day, affording extensive views across the landscape. Waddesdon was a treat, with market stalls lining the promenade to the manor entrance, resplendent with their Christmas fare. Bailey's hot chocolate, mulled wine, duck burgers, pizza and battered sprouts were some of the offerings, with brewers and cheese makers, gifts of silverware and skincare, plus clothing and pet treats amongst the market.

In the stables, the first port of call for many to enjoy lunch, we found a wonderful display of children's fairy tale themed artwork, including



Jack & the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood (pictured top right is the fantastic larger than life wolverine grandma), and the Tin Soldier.

In the extensive gardens, we found the aviary, with birds from across the world such as this curious Somali brown breasted barbet, and the robin of sempervivum.



The house was stunningly decorated with a sleeping Beauty theme, including artwork by Russian Jewish artist Leon Bakst (1866 – 1924) which featured the De Rothschilds as key characters. Notable was the light feature, "Porca Misera" by Ingo Maurer, above far left, named after a viewer's exclamatory response of "Holy Cow".

At sunset, the garden light trail delighted with its giant reindeer and baubles. Grateful thanks to **Jackie Poyner** for her hard work organising. **Lisa**



## Delivery

by

Geraldine Wall



A glance out between the curtains shows the street lights are still that depressing chemical orange. I step carefully on to my non-slip bath mat and realise that I have a check list in my head carrying red-flag warnings. Hearing-aids removed? Glasses? Slippers? What new idiocy will be added to that list (all based on past mishaps) before the year is out?

There have been warnings of all this coming on. There have been decades of warnings – neural raised fingers asking to have attention paid. Like the first shower shocker. I had got out, dried myself as usual and pulled on jeans but the chill morning air brought the horrifying revelation that damp patches in the denim had mysteriously appeared. I must now, it seemed, for the rest of my life *lift* my buttocks to dry underneath them.

Senescence is like adolescence - you don't know what change in body or mind will hit you next and, despite upbeat messages to the contrary from all sides to exercise and eat your five a day, there isn't much that you can do about it. I am also horribly aware of being in a plodding cohort which is losing comrades to left and right from the Sniper's Bullet. Friends fall from stroke, cancer, dementia – all the ills that flesh is heir to - and I think, let it not be *that* bullet for me, or yes, please, *that* one will do nicely when the time comes. The latter is obviously the quick and painless assassination - the heart attack while doing a crossword, the aortic aneurism (which has been secretly plotting to do away with me for years) exploding while I admire the ocean view from a cliff top.

Then there are the trivial alterations which loom, most days, much larger than the Sniper's Bullet. In my case it's astonishing that not only my hair but my eyes have changed colour. They used to be brown, now they're blue. *Arca senilis* - the words first murmured by a curious medic when I was in my thirties followed by a later diagnosis of *fat-in-the-eye* which sounds worse. *Mea culpa* blue eyes.

As for wrinkles, I just don't believe that other people see what I see when I look in the mirror. Surely, I don't look like that to other people? Impossible. Of course, it's a blessing of age that friends and relatives in the same cohort are also not seeing as well as they did so it's entirely possible your face doesn't look like the cooled skin on boiled milk to them either. We peer at each other's blurred faces with equanimity. I always wondered why old people stopped taking photos of themselves – now I know.

And let's not start on aches and pains. I remember the glamorous senior actor Angela Lansbury featuring in a US advertisement for pain medication. She was cosily admitting to the aches and pains that come with the later years. I can remember thinking (all those decades ago) *what* aches and pains? What's she talking about? She was probably talking about sore backs, hips and knees and the pleasingly named but annoying trigger finger phenomenon (necessitating having to flip the affected fingers back in place like light switches) to say nothing of crawling upstairs on all fours after a long day because the legs have finished their shift and clocked off. And yes, I know about the great-grannies doing marathons at eighty-six and David Attenborough and all that and good luck to them but this is me. Ok. On with today. I eventually assemble myself into something that won't frighten callers and set about it.

At ten o'clock the post comes just as I'm hoping it will rain so I don't have to go for a walk and can carry on reading my latest Sansom novel instead. Reading fiction in the morning! Yes, there are new guilty pleasures – it's not all challenging.



There's something rare in the post so I toss the junk mail to one side. I am holding in my hand a white card with a floral border. It orders me to *Save the Date*. (The imperative voice is used so much now, isn't it? We're constantly being bossed about by advertising, healthcare, politicians, our cars and so on.) But this, this command I don't mind at all. In fact, I'm thrilled by it.

Grace is getting married (dear God, she must be twenty-four) and I have been told to *Save the Date* which means that I'm invited! Wreathed by the delicate artwork is a photograph of Grace and James wrapped in each other's arms.

I feel a deep shift in my world.

For a moment I can't identify it but then it comes to me - what has changed. Standing by the kitchen sink (a bit of hand-washing half done) I stare at the wreckage of my brown and grey winter garden and see bluebells and tulips. The shift in me is that I have flipped into the future tense. It's as though I've been pottering around an unremarkable wood at twilight – not unhappy, not much visited by moments of joy or misery – and a bright light has snapped on in the distance. A beacon. In a second it's shifted me into the future. What will I wear? Will Joe be there? God, will he?

I used to always live in the future, always be thinking about the next thing and hardly registering the present at all. That was a sin against my own happiness. I know now that the things, the people, the places that were within my grasp were of priceless value.

But I hold the *Save the Date* card and smile at Grace and James in love and, seized by a daft whim, kiss their faces. Young, hopeful people full of life have beckoned me to join them.

Suddenly, so much to do.

**Geraldine Wall, Kings Norton Afternoon WI**



## The Trustee's Challenge



The Trustees Challenge for this 2024-2025 year, announced at the Annual Meeting in October, is for the Cats Protection League and we are asking members to make knitted and crochet mice.

Here are the links to patterns as announced at the Annual Meeting, they have also been sent as separate flyers for your WI secretary to disseminate with the COG.

[www.whodunnknit.com/wp-content/uploads/Captain-Cat-Battler.pdf](http://www.whodunnknit.com/wp-content/uploads/Captain-Cat-Battler.pdf)

[www.cats.org.uk/media/2410/cp\\_captain\\_cat\\_battler\\_lo-res\\_final.pdf](http://www.cats.org.uk/media/2410/cp_captain_cat_battler_lo-res_final.pdf)

Although there are no crochet mice patterns specifically designed and promoted for Cats Protection League, there are many crochet patterns for mice available on the internet that can be used.

Please adhere to the health and safety guidelines and regulations when knitting and crocheting for charity items. The Cats Protection website advises:

*"...when knitting [or crocheting] a toy or blanket, it's best to avoid the use of stretchy yarns or small plastic items – such as those that can be used for mouse eyes – to reduce the risk of injury to cats and kittens. Loose weave blanket patterns involving the use of large needles are best avoided too. The charity also suggests that cat owners regularly inspect cat toys for signs of wear or damage, not to leave cats unattended with knitted toys, and not to use knitted toys or blankets with cats that have wool-chewing habits."* [www.cats.org.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/feline-like-knitting-for-a-good-cause](http://www.cats.org.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/feline-like-knitting-for-a-good-cause)

Happy Knitting!



*I'm Back!*

Hi, It's Julie. After a period of absence, I've returned to pick up the reins for the Arts and Activities committee.

In the past few months, members enjoyed the annual skittles match at Hockley Heath, with a second venue added over in Aldridge. Both were well attended and much fun was had by all.

Arrangements for this year's **Christmas Celebration** are well under way. The theme this year is **INSPIRATION**. We hope as many members as possible will come to the event on **Saturday 7th December** at 11-12 am at St Martins in the Bullring. This is an annual event and has been held and attended by many members for some years now. As usual it will be a good mix of old favourites and fresh new ideas. Please come and please bring your families and friends. This event is open to all.




Our singer is Shannon The Vocalist, this year's winner of The Black Country Museum's Battle of the Bands competition. We are inviting the congregation to add a message or words of inspiration to the church Christmas tree, as we did last year. These will be left for church visitors to read and enjoy during the Christmas season. Buy your tickets on the door; £7 including refreshments after the event. We look forward to seeing you there to celebrate the festive season in true WI style.

The flyer has now gone out for the 2025 Darts competition. Please return your teams entry form and cheque to me asap. Closing date Friday 6th December. We are considering trying to get a similar competition on the other side of the city in the Aldridge catchment area. If your WI would be keen to enter if this was arranged, please send me an email confirming your interest. I will move further with this depending on the number of WIs who express an interest.



Wishing you all a peaceful festive time and I will be back with more activities in the new year.

### Editor's Pick – Let's Dance

 Put on your red shoes... and dance your way into 2025! I love nothing more than dancing!

Angela Rippon rejuvenated her love of dance after appearing on Strictly and recognising its benefits to physical and mental health, is now spearheading a campaign to get the nation dancing!

Alongside the Together Coalition and the Sports and Recreation Alliance she is launching the #Let's Dance campaign on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2025.

Could your WI lead a dance session? Or organise a dance club night? Find out how you can get involved:

[My WI | Let's Dance](#)

**Lisa**



### Would you like to see your WI featured here? We would!

Send your contributions, with your name, and WI name as title to:

[COGMEDIAWMFWI@gmail.com](mailto:COGMEDIAWMFWI@gmail.com)

**Next deadline: 10/01/24**

Please send submissions by the above date to ensure inclusion. It may not be possible to include all submissions. Texts may be altered to fit available space. Please send original images as individual jpeg files, documents as word documents, and include your WI's name in the email title.

Many thanks. **Lisa Blackburn, Editor**



## **16 days of activism against gender-based violence; November 25th–December 10th**

Latest estimates from the annual Crime Survey for England & Wales, published in June 2024, reported that 2.2 million victims over the age of 16 years had experienced domestic abuse.

Tackling domestic violence has been a longstanding concern of the WI. WI members have campaigned to make sure that women and girls can live the lives they choose, free from the fear of abuse.

The 16 days of activism is a chance for WI members to show support to survivors and help bring an end to this atrocious issue. If you, or your WI are planning to take part in this year's campaign, then please let us know. These may include:

- Look up the latest data for domestic violence and sexual assault in your local community. <https://www.police.uk/>
- Holding a donation drive to collect essential items to give to your local women's refuge. Find your local refuge <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/womens-aid-directory/>
- Invite a representative from your local women's refuge to talk to your WI group
- Hold a candlelight vigil inviting WI members and local community organisations to join in. You may require permission from your local council.
- Encourage family, friends, and colleagues to wear orange during the campaign – 'Orange the World' is a global initiative, the colour orange is bright and optimistic and represents a future free from violence against women and girls.
- Contact your MP or Police & Crime Commissioner raising concerns about violence against women and girls and asking for vital measures to tackle the issue.

## **Public Affairs Digest from NFWI**

The NFWI Public Affairs team publish a monthly electronic update on all the latest WI campaigning news. Its quick and easy to subscribe on the MyWI website. [My WI | Public affairs and campaigns](#)

## **Advance Notice: Voting for Resolutions 2024-5**

WI members will be invited to vote for their preferred resolution during January 2025. Details of how votes will be collected and collated across the region will be available from mid-December onwards. Full details and accompanying resources of this years shortlisted resolutions are available on MyWI website, these are

- ❖ Let's talk about incontinence
- ❖ Bystanders can be lifesavers
- ❖ Join the repair revolution.
- ❖ Eliminate landfill of medication packaging

Every WI member has the opportunity to cast their vote for the resolution they support.

For WMFWI public affairs enquiries please contact: [wmfwi.pa@gmail.com](mailto:wmfwi.pa@gmail.com).

