

Steeple Ashton WI Newsletter



Welcome to the May 'meeting' of WI!

I've had some lovely responses & contributions from members since the last (and 1st!) Newsletter and I'm going to include some of them in this one. I'll leave some for the June Newsletter, in case we are still unable to meet by then. But thank you to everyone.

I hope you enjoy the photo of Ann & Trevor Ryan's Wisteria, which is stunning & this year the scent seems to be stronger than ever! Apart from sharing some of our members' childhood memories, I've included some information about women in WWII, in recognition of VE Day on 8th May. Hope you don't mind.



Karina's Oak Tree



Ann Hunt's Clivia



Marian's Malus Rudolph

WI IN WORLD WAR II



Thousands of tons of fruit were boiled in WI preservation centres



Among many other activities the WI collected herbs for medicinal purposes



WI markets sold surplus produce - mainly fruit and veg - from WI members, smallholders and allotment holders.

Memories

Last month I wrote about my garden journey and memories of my parents' garden. Also about the Log Store vs the Coal Shed! Some members responded with some lovely memories so here they are - and thank you for taking the time to send them. x

Hello Marian

I did enjoy reading your Newsletter right from the beginning. When I was little, my father was definitely not a gardener and like you say, worked very hard. At the time we lived in Kingsbury, which is near Wembley. My parents stayed in that same house until they died. I have to say that after many, many moves John and I have had, my best garden is in Steeple Ashton, but I created too many flower beds!! I have all the photos on my computer and as my screen saver is my "photos" they randomly pop up and it gives me much pleasure. I really want to do more here, but daren't!

Thanks for showing us yours, I really enjoyed it. Our log store was in a small brick built building, which evidently used to be the wash house of the original cottage that stood on that plot. And like you, it was good to see them all neatly piled up.

*Both of you keep well.
Chris (Smith)*

Dear Marian

Thank you for your News Letter very informative I have also not been to Exbury. I have never been a big gardener but learning rapidly. Picture of a beautiful oak on my daily walk. Love Karina

Hi Marian

...Thanks for connecting. Your gardening newsletter was superb and I loved both Jean and Rosie's comments. Please pass on one of my coal fire memories linked in a way with Jean's memory of coaxing a fire into life with a spade and newspaper to create a draught!

Living in a terraced home with only 2 downstairs rooms my father was loath to start afresh in the front room lighting another fire whilst one was already burning well. He therefore got the shovel, removed the front off the living room grate and scraped the existing burning coals onto this dodgy mini spade. He then proceeded to walk through the room with these burning fiery coals. My brother and I were pinned against the wall in fear of our lives We were rewarded thankfully with an instant fire in the posh but rather smoky tv room and enjoyed our mid 50s evening programme with Eric Sykes on the 9" screen!

*Lots of love to both
Bett x x*

Dear Marian,

Enjoyed it all. Had not thought about my Mother & Father holding up a newspaper over the fire, to help it get going for many a year. Enjoyed the photos & that about John Clare-very interesting, wish I had been with you all in the WI party at Exbury, though I had been there years ago-lovely gardens. Love & thanks, Jeanxx

Can't agree about coal sheds though.

1. We lived in the cottage next to you when I was small (have almost got over the move!) My swing hung at the coal shed door. I loved swinging in to the dark and out into the sun and spent hours singing and swinging there. Confession: Mrs Hibbert must have told me off one day and I was cross! So, as I swung I dragged my feet in the coal dust and then smeared her sheets which hung on the clothes line just in reach. This was actually a worse crime than it would be today because Mrs Hibbert would have been up early to light the fire under the copper to boil her washing. Years later I apologized to her - she laughed and said she couldn't remember - I still feel bad about it! It was a lovely shed.

2. My family did the same re drawing the fire. One lunch hour mum caught the paper ablaze and quickly put it out as it blew into the room. Some minutes later she noticed smoke coming up from the back of the chair my sister was sitting in!

Fortunately mum could move fast!

Rosie

LETTER FROM ALISON

Dear Members,

Another month and we are still in lockdown. I do hope you are all keeping well. At our meeting this month we should have been discussing the Resolution topics: 'A call to increase potential stem cell donor registration' and 'End modern slavery'. I hope you have all had a chance to look at the pointers that were given in the April edition of WI Life, and so able to form your own opinion as to how the voting should have gone. I suppose these will be carried forward to next year, but who knows?

The competition was for 'A Bluebell in any medium', there is a good subject for the artists among you; or maybe a photo of Bluebells you have seen when out and about on your daily walks. I know that this year there seems to have been a particularly good display, and it seemed to me that they started a bit earlier than usual. Please share any artistic efforts with Marian, and she could perhaps include them in her June Newsletter (if we need one!) or in a separate mailing if she is inundated with them.

I wonder how you have kept yourselves busy, particularly when the days have been wet. I have been making up scrubs bags for the hospitals from old bed linen and fabric given to me. I have found it very satisfying and feel I am giving back in a small way. I just hope the need for these will soon cease. After that I think I could go into production of cloth shopping bags, but they will need to be a better standard than the bags I'm making at the moment!

I would particularly like to thank Marian for keeping us all well informed with WI issues and Rosie and others for their contributions of quizzes and poems to keep our little grey cells active. Wishing you all a good month and hope we get more sunshine to enjoy our gardens.

Alison



Native Bluebell



Hybrid Spanish-Bluebell

ODDS & SODS

POEM - The Virus

The Virus is so very small
You cannot tell he's there at all
Until his playfulness is seen
Displayed on your computer screen.
His puckish face is wreathed in smiles
As he corrupts your precious files;
And few things give him greater glee
Than wiping out your memory -
And leaving nothing, at a stroke
(Your backups, too, go up in smoke).
The best protection is, I think,
Not Firewalls, but Pen & Ink!!
Anon.

WILTSHIRE DID YOU KNOWs?

The architect, Sir Christopher Wren (1632 - 1723) was born in East Knoyle, a little village near the border with Dorset and Somerset, where his father was the rector. Christopher was born in lodgings above Haslam's Shop, where Knoyle House now stands. The Wren family had been forced to move there temporarily after a fire at the rectory.

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Below Win Green, high up on the Wiltshire Downs, where Cranborne Chase swoops down to the Nadder Valley, sits Ashcombe House, home of pop singer Madonna and her husband Guy Ritchie. The house used to be the home of photographer Sir Cecil Beaton (1904 -80), who is buried not far away in All Saints churchyard at Broad Chalke.

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In the churchyard at Alvediston, is the grave of Sir Anthony Eden, first Earl of Avon (1897 - 1977), the Prime Minister brought down by the Suez Crisis.

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Housed in the Crofton Pumping Station near Gt. Bedwyn is the oldest working steam-driven engine in the world, made by Boulton & Watt in 1812. This engine is still in its original location and capable of performing the task for which it was installed. It is now open to visitors & has a cafe!

## BRIDGE CHAPELS

St Ives has one of only 4 remaining Bridge Chapels in Britain. The others are at Wakefield & Rotherham in Yorkshire and Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire. Bridge chapels were fairly common in Medieval times and were used by travellers to pray for a safe crossing or to give thanks for a safe arrival.

## OLD WILTSHIRE WORDS

(allegedly!)

**Bittish** - Somewhat.

**Bobbish** - In good health

**Butchers' Guinea-pigs** - Woodlice

**Crumplings, Crumplens** - Small, imperfectly grown apples

**Dumbledore** - Bumblebee

**Flamtag** - A slatternly woman! Women not liked also known as: Flib-me-jig; floppetty; he-body; huckmuck; hag-mag - the list goes on!

**Garley-gut** - A gluttonous person

**Hen-Hussey** - A meddlesome woman

**Rumple** - to seduce

**Skug, Sqwug** - A Squirrel

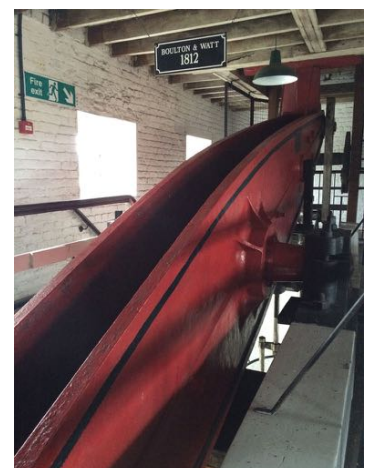
**Toad-stabber** - a blunt knife

Clearly there was a lot said about women - probably by a Garley-gut who failed to Rumple the lady of his dreams!!!

## BOULTON & WATT

### BEAM ENGINE

1812





## THE WI, STEEPLE ASHTON & WOMEN DURING WWII



*By the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the WI was a well-established pillar of rural life in Britain, with institutes in more than 5,500 villages. But its National Executive Committee initially struggled to decide whether the WI would be able to help with the war effort at all as they had taken a strong anti-war stance. However, Lady Denman realised that the WI's members would want to 'do their bit' so she suggested that the WI might be called upon to help with caring for evacuees and with rural food production.*

*Her predictions proved correct and the WI made a significant contribution on the home front. These are just some of the ways its members helped the war effort:*

***Helping to settle evacuees** into rural communities. Members in reception areas were active in billeting and receiving evacuees and often organised activities such as country walks and tea parties to help keep the children occupied. In 1939 they assisted the Government scheme by carrying out a survey of rural homes to find out how many households might be able to take evacuees. In 1941, they also published an influential report on their members' experiences of evacuation.*

***Raising Money** via its own National Savings Scheme*

***Operating Market Stalls***

***Knitting** for service personnel & their own use*

***Growing Onions, Tomatoes & Potatoes** - the fall of France meant a shortage of onions!*

***Collecting Rosehips for Vit C** - Oranges were scarce so WI & others were asked to collect 500 tons of Rosehips for pharmacists to make Rosehip syrup which was rich in Vit C.*

***Making Jam** - not the joke it is today. Realising that much of the fruit from the summer's harvest would go to waste unless it was made into jam, WI secured sugar from the Ministry of Food. Surplus fruit was gathered in from gardens and allotments or growing wild and in their first wave of jam-making, it is estimated that the WI saved 450 tons of fruit from rotting,*

***Preserving Food** In 1940, the Queen visited the WI canning centre in Buckinghamshire*

## VIOLETTE SZABO



Violette Szabo (nee Bushell), was one of 60 women recruited by Churchill for the SEO (Special Operations Executive) who were deployed to “set Europe ablaze”. They were parachuted behind enemy lines to help form a secret army of resistance fighters preparing the way for the Allied Invasion.

She was 23 when, on her second mission into occupied France, she was captured by the Germans, interrogated, tortured and deported to Ravensbruck concentration camp, where she was executed in February 1945, not long before the end of the war.

A humble museum dedicated to Violette Szabo is located in Herefordshire, in England, in a house that Violette's English cousins formerly owned. She also has a bronze bust at the Albert Embankment of the River Thames. Other plaques and memorials with her name are located in France.



## WOMEN IN STEEPLE ASHTON

(Contributed by Rosie Brett-Green)

As the outlook at home became more foreboding, the ‘Home Front’ was strengthened by the formation of an Invasion and Civil Defence Committee. So begins a report of civilian life in Steeple Ashton during WWII.

A committee of about 16 people first met on 13th August 1941. Of these, only 4 were women and Mrs F Matthews who lived on the village green, represented the WI. The Billeting Officer was a woman, Mrs Tilton, who lived in The Strand & who along with her husband, paid for the electrification of the church organ in commemoration of her sons.

The WI was still active at the beginning of the war, but it seems that the enormous drain of war saw its demise as women as well as men volunteered for Air Raid Precautions (ARP) training & First Aid training, becoming wardens and nurses. It is noted that the ARP shifts often ended in the pub!

Initially, the Womens' Voluntary Service (later WRVS) grew in number. Headed up by Miss Dixon from The Sanctuary, it had 33 members, with a 'housewives' section of 29. Its activities included Stirrup Pump Parties (not the celebration kind!), Fire Fighting Lectures, Anti-Gas measures, ARP, weekly collecting of War Savings & Flag Days. Billeting of evacuated mothers and children was the remit of the WVS who undertook repairs of gas masks, darning, mending & knitting for the troops, running a canteen in the Village Hall for the RAF and on the 'drome for the WAAF, as well as collecting Rosehips! In all, the WVS, between 18th March 1944 and 30th September 1945 provided 47,732 cups of tea or coffee and 90,286 cakes and sandwiches!

11 women joined Womens' Services, of which 6 joined the ATS with the two Miss Dixons continuing as hospital drivers after the war as well as breeding dogs! Margaret Phillips and Nora Gunstone joined the WAAF and Noreen Long joined the WRNS. Two more became nurses: Joan Whiting became a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment), serving all over the country in military hospitals, including Westbury.

Betty Marriot, Rosie's mum, served with the Civil Nursing Reserve in Gloucester. One evening, cycling home in the black-out and taking a wrong turning at the Air Balloon roundabout, she only realised her mistake after 2 miles! She also worked on the troop train at Wilton and worked on Ralph Whitlock's farm when off duty.

The WI re-formed in 1949, when Betty Smith (Nee Marriott) became Secretary. They were welcomed with the words "Good, the WI needs young women like you". Nothing changes!

PS. Emergency rations at the 'Bottom Shop" in the High Street consisted of:

2 1/2 tonnes biscuit; 9cwt Beef; 2 cwt Condensed Milk; 6 cwt Baked Beans; 1 cwt Tea; 6 cwt Sugar; 20 cwt Margarine.

In emergency, these would be distributed within 2 hours and the shop closed!

This memorial to the women of WWII is in Whitehall, London and is the first and only one in the UK. It was only erected in 2005! It is a big, black block of bronze, 22ft high, 16ft long and 6ft wide. The sides are sculpted in 17 sets of clothing & uniforms worn by women during the war and symbolizing the many different jobs they undertook. - *I'm not sure this is the **best** memorial they could have made, are you? Ed.*



## AND FINALLY!...

I hope you've enjoyed doing the Quizzes & Anagrams over the last few weeks—don't forget to 'research' the answers you don't know, it's not cheating, it's education, which is what the WI is all about! You could also ask your children and grandchildren to help - they might learn something!

Any contributions or ideas for the next Newsletter (assuming we are still not allowed to meet!), will be gratefully received.

### MRS LANDEMARE'S WARTIME FRUITCAKE

~ AS BAKED FOR WINSTON CHURCHILL - BUT PROBABLY ADAPTED! ~

*Preheat oven to 150 degrees and line and grease a cake tin*

225g Butter

170g Dark Brown sugar

285g Self-raising flour

280g Dried Mixed fruit

5 Eggs

110g Halved Glace Cherries

1 tsp Mixed Spice

1 tbsp black treacle (optional)

1. Soak the dried fruit in tea, preferably overnight
2. Cream together the butter and sugar in a bowl, until almost white.
3. Gradually beat in the eggs. Add flour if necessary to stop curdling
4. Fold in the flour and add the mixed spice
5. Add the mixed fruit and glace cherries and fold together
6. Continue to fold and stir while adding the black treacle
7. Once mixed completely, scrape mixture into the cake tin and bake for 2 hours.
8. Check that the cake is cooked through before cooling on a wire rack
9. Finish with a light dusting of caster or icing sugar