

Meldreth WI



November 2010

Meldreth WI President Mrs Barbara Chalkley.

To be president in our 90th year is an honour. Who will it be in our 100th year?

I was one of the young mums who joined in the mid 60s.

Reading through this leaflet, you cannot but be struck by the varied activities. Things have changed since 1920. We've become more sophisticated and have changed with the times. The aspect that hasn't changed and I hope it never will, is the friendship.

A few years ago we welcomed ladies from Melbourn when their WI had to close giving us a boost to our numbers.

Thanks to all who helped in the production of this leaflet.

Well done Ladies.

Here's to the future!

Barbara Chalkley

Beginnings

The WI was born in 1897 at Stoney Creek, Canada. Its creator, Adelaide Hoodless, following the death of her fourth child due to contaminated milk, formed a group for women in her isolated rural community. Her aim was to offer friendship and support to other women in such communities; to promote better understanding of health and hygiene, child care and education at a time when agriculture was in a state of decline. The WI arrived in Anglesey, Wales in 1915. The British Government promoted the development of the WI to support women in the isolated rural villages and increase food production particularly necessary during the Great War which took men away from agriculture.

Meldreth WI was formed in 1920. Meldreth was then a small village whose workforce was closely tied to agriculture and orchards and later at the Atlas Stone Company. Since World War 2, the village has increased in size and population. By 1965 there were 325 houses in the village. Now residents are more likely to commute to London, Cambridge or Royston.

At venues ranging from a disused, unlicensed chapel off the High Street to the Meldreth Village School Hall and latterly, at the Village Hall, the thriving WI plays an important role in village life. Its members value it for the support and friendship it offers in keeping with the original founder's principles and particularly the democratic approach which from the start is at the heart of the WI.

At the 35th Birthday celebrations in 1945, two of the original founder members were noted, with pleasure, as present. Our own longer-serving members, who joined in the late 1950's onward, recall that as young mothers, the WI was (and continues to be) of great value because of the support and friendship it provided. All have served on the committee and/or held office.

During the last 90 years, monthly meetings have covered a wealth of subjects providing enjoyment, inspiration and broadening knowledge. Here are a few of the subjects covered:

- Corsetry and figure control
- TV Suppers
- Trussing Fowl
- Flying Concorde
- A talk by the Matron of Addenbrookes Hospital (The original)
- Ghosts

The work, sewing, embroidery and crafts produced under the tutelage of Mrs Jude is spoken of with awe by those fortunate to have known her. A competition in her name is now held regularly by the Cambridgeshire Federation WI keeping alive the high standards she attained and promoted in others. Our members are justifiably proud of the certificates for their work.

Whilst monthly competitions are no longer held, it is fascinating to read about them. Who would be a judge? Here are a few of interest:

- A posy in a yoghurt pot
- A self-made necklace
- A garden in a sandwich tin
- Paper hats
- Best-wrapped parcel
- Salad on a tea plate
- Harvest Festival on a tray
- Hot Water Bottle cover
- The best darned sock
- Peeling potatoes blindfolded

There was a Social Roll call event entitled “It makes me laugh or sing” in a Pay or Say session but no indication of what this involved. And what is an “Under-the-counter” Stall”? Maybe you can tell us.

Drama Group

The Meldreth WI ran a very successful Drama Group at one time. It gave members the opportunity to take part in Amateur Dramatics amongst friends. Members have said that not only did it provide the participants with worthwhile and enjoyable experiences, but it also helped them to gain confidence which then permeated other areas of their life.

Productions covered Music Hall, Christmas Shows and shorter sketches. As usual, husbands were willing volunteers in helping with lighting and the stage production.

Darts

Meldreth WI has taken part in the Cambridgeshire Federation Regional Darts contest. Often 2 teams have participated and all have enjoyed the interaction with other WI teams in Cambridgeshire at home and away. An annual cup is awarded at Meldreth to the player with the highest individual score.

Community activities

In looking through the archives, it is clear that the WI has always played a valuable role in the community. The village hall flower tubs have been taken into the responsibility of the WI and are a source of pleasure for all. Recent activities have included making a scarecrow for Wimpole Hall as well as regular participation in the village fete and the church Christmas tree festival. This taxes not just the imagination but also the creative skills of members.

Sewing

There is a regular sewing get-together where quilts are produced as well as items for the Christmas Tree Festival. This helps to keep alive the development of craft skills which seem to be disappearing in the rural community. An example of the quilts currently hangs in the Village Hall.

Recently WI members inspired and led by our President, Mrs Barbara Chalkley, have been involved in a project locally to encourage shoppers at a local shop, Fieldgate, to use bags made by members from disused curtains etc instead of plastic bags. The project was very successful, over 50 bags in all, and people were very happy to take away their new brightly coloured bags.

Cavalcade Millennium Celebration

One notable event was our celebration of the Millennium.

We put on a fashion show of clothes dating from 1897- 2000. The clothes were gathered from many sources including Charity shops, Jumble sales and raiding members' and family wardrobes

We worked on this for over a year but the effort was well worth it and we had a lot of fun.

Husbands were supportive but sceptical. They need not have worried, it was a huge success.

The hall was packed and we were WACKED!

Barbara

The WI, renowned for Jam and Jerusalem, continues to take a keen interest in the problems that confront us in everyday life and in protecting our fragile planet. Keeping Fit is one aspect reflected in the Monday walks, Keep Fit class at the Village Hall and partaking in the Triathlon event organised nationally. We were given a target for members to swim, cycle and walk all as they wished but recording mileage etc. We more than reached our target with a good proportion of members taking part. Other national campaigns that we have supported recently have been Saving the Honey Bee, with a very interesting speaker, an apiarist, on keeping honey bees in Cambridge. We also decorated our Christmas tree with all things associated with bees, including a variety of handmade bees by members.

The following non-fattening recipe is taken from the CFWI Cookery book.

A Fun Cake

1 Lively President
1 Shrewd Treasure
1 Organised Secretary
10 Excellent Speakers
Outings for Seasons
1 Cup of Husband Support
Wakeful members
1 Tablespoon of Fundraising
Stir well, gently rolling boil.

Serve hot or cold according to weather

The following is part of a poem by "Gilly" as she liked to be called, written to celebrate the Meldreth WI 75th Birthday. A stalwart, amusing and loyal member of Meldreth WI, she passed away this year and is much missed.

Whilst this is not the complete poem, It does give the flavour of the passing of time and is no less relevant to our 90th Birthday celebrations and demonstrates Gilly's love of life.

*Funny cloche hats and frilly dresses
Goodbye now to waistline tresses
Bobs and shingles reign supreme
In this the 1920 scene.
Talkies and erotic dances
Each one's making the most of chances
After years of war and strife now was the time to live a life.*

.....
*In the 90's we were more aware
And no longer stand and stare
But try to right the wrongs we see, a better life and one that's free.*

*And whether times were good or bad
Happy times or rather sad
In Meldreth in those far off years
Amongst those many joys and tears
A group of ladies, just a few
Decided what they had to do
A WI they then would start
In village affairs to play their part.
So we celebrate in 95
That spirit which is still alive
And hope for many years to come we can extend to everyone
The friendship these ladies could foresee in meetings held for you and me.*

Gilly (Mrs Doris Gilham) written 13.10.95

Past Presidents of Meldreth WI

It has not been possible to identify all past presidents.

1920-1928	Possibly Mrs Jebb, but no information
1928-1933	Mrs Jebb
1933-1959	No information
1959-1967	Mrs Powles
1967-1968	Mrs Marfleet
1969-1972	Mrs Powles
1972-1974	Mrs Hopkins
1974-1975	Mrs Brown
1975-1976	Mrs Gilbert
1976-1979	Mrs Walford
1979-1982	Mrs Gipson
1982-1985	Mrs Gilham
1985-1988	Mrs Burchett
1988-1991	Mrs Course
1991-1999	Mrs Bates
1999-2002	Mrs Symonds
2002-2005	Mrs Pryke
2005-2008	Mrs Bates
2008 to date	Mrs Chalkley

For our centenary celebrations it might be nice to fill in some of the gaps.