The Development of East Devon Women's Institutes in the 1920s

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Two years after the first British Women's Institute (WI) meeting in Anglesey, in 1917 the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) – a non-party-political voluntary organisation – was formed by the Agricultural Organisation Society. Its aim was to encourage countrywomen nationally to get involved in growing and preserving food to increase supplies as part of the war effort.

During the interwar years, regeneration of village life was a national aim, with widespread interest in rural adult education alongside building village halls. WIs were a successful part of this trend, providing village education and leisure activities with other organisations such as the Workers' Education Association, Rural Community Councils, Local Education Authorities and Young Farmers' Clubs.[1]

The WI movement grew quickly in the 1920s, from 187 institutes nationally in 1917 to 1,405 in 1919 and c. 2,000 by the end of the decade.[2] In Devon there were 26 branches in 1920, when the Devon Federation of Women's Institutes (DFWI) formed. This rose to 71 branches in 1924, 126 branches with 7,600 members in 1928, and 133 branches with 8,860 members in 1929.[3] East Devon had the first Devon branch in Cullompton in 1917, 12 branches by 1920, 26 branches by 1922 and at least 34 branches in 1929.

Based on case studies of East Devon WI branches, this paper examines three questions:

1) Did East Devon WI branches meet initial national objectives?[4]
2) Who were the women who led them, and was there a link between women who led the suffrage movement and the East Devon WI branches?
3) Did the WI branches reinforce traditional separate spheres of interest for women or did they open up new opportunities for women?

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[1] *The English Countryside Between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?* ed. Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burkhardt and Lynne Thompson (Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 7–8, 236–8.

[2] Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (Lawrence and Wishart, 2015) p.63; The WI, 'History', <https://www.thewi.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-wi> [accessed 18 April 2024]

[3] *Western Times*, 12 June 1920; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 7 May 1924; *Western Morning News*, 8 November 1929.

[4] East Devon has been taken to include Alphington, Holcombe Burnell and Ide as reported as part of East Devon at that time: see 'Women's Institutes: East Devon Work', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 29 April 1922. In due course, Alphington, Holcombe Burnell and Ide were included in an Alphington group, with places further west (*Western Times*, 11 October 1946, p.7).

Objectives of Women Institutes in Devon in 1919

In April 1919, the women's branch of the Devon Agricultural Committee (DAC) heard Miss Clowes, paid organiser for the NFWI, explain the purposes of WIs: 'to stimulate interest in agricultural industry; the development of cooperative enterprise; education, for example, in home economics; and a social side with dancing and folk song'.[5]

In June 1919, a subcommittee of the Women's DAC was formed to forward the WI movement in Devon and to establish a panel of speakers. Organised by Miss Calmady-Hamlyn, it had a strong East Devon emphasis, attended by Mrs Gidleigh (Cullompton), Mrs Lang (Sidford) and Mrs Horne (Exmouth/Holcombe Burnell).[6] It was noted, 'great activity is shown in East Devon where it is proposed to form the first group of Village Institutes'.

In November 1919, Mrs Nugent Harris, secretary of the national committee, spoke to the WI School in Exeter, describing WI's aims as:

> To promote education generally; to be characteristic of the place and people; to revive old industries; to cooperate with the Education Authority; and to be a cooperative enterprise in which women help each other in many ways.[7]

In December 1919, the DAC agreed to make provision for lectures and demonstrations in various subjects by the committee's staff, with grants available to WIs for basket making and boot repairing.[8]

The new committee was strongly weighted towards East Devon. In addition to an East Devon president, Lady Clinton of Bicton, were six representatives of eleven East Devon villages/towns, compared to three representatives from West Devon for six villages and one representative from South Devon for two villages. The East Devon representatives in 1920 were: Lady Clinton (Exmouth/Budleigh/Littleham group), Mrs Lang (Sidford), Mrs Gidleigh (Cullompton), Miss Fulford (Woodbury/Lympstone), Mrs Beck (Hawkchurch) and Miss Lucas (Ide, Alphington and Holcombe Burnell, which were then regarded as East Devon villages). [9] Other branches opened during the 1920s, such as Axminster (1921), Uffculme (by 1921), East Budleigh (by 1921), Honiton (1923), Broadhembury (1923), Otterton (pre-1924) and Culmstock (1926), which integrated into the groups.

Leading Figures in the Devon Federation of Women's Institutes

Two key figures in the DFWI were Lady Clinton, president, from East Devon, and Miss Calmady-Hamlyn, chairman, from North Devon.[10] Lady Clinton, daughter of the Earl of

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[5]*Western Times,* 26 April 1919, p. 4.

[6]*Western Times,* 21 June 1919, p. 2.

[7]*Western Times,* 7 November 1919, p. 6. The WI School provided a week of lectures and activities for members, including talks on what went on in other WIs (*Western Times*, 8 November 1919, *Exmouth Chronicle*, 10 February 1920).

[8]Devon County Council, Executive and Agricultural Committee Minutes, 11 December 1919, p. 3.

[9]*Western Times*, 12 June 1920.

[10]Julia Neville and Helen Turnbull, 'Jane Grey Clinton (1863–1953)' *Devon Women in Public and Professional Life 1900–1950* by Julia Neville, Mitzi Auchterlonie, Paul Auchterlonie, Ann Roberts (University of Exeter Press, 2021), pp. 179–202; 'Mary Sylvia Calmady-Hamlyn (1881–1962)' by Julia Neville et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 203 ff.

Arran, married Charles Baron Clinton, a Conservative and a leading figure in the Country Landowners' Association, Lord of the Manor of Exmouth from 1907, and in 1917 parliamentary secretary to the Department of Agriculture. Lady Clinton's two major focuses in Devon were the Girl Guides and the WIs. Until 1924, she focussed her attention on East Devon WI branches but after Miss Calmady-Hamlyn resigned in 1924 increasingly supported other Devon branches as well.

In June 1920, Lady Clinton told the newly formed DFWI that the WI had 'caught on in a surprising way'. Village life was distressingly monotonous, especially for women, but the WI taught cooking, baking, clothes-making, ambulance work, and rules of child and health welfare. Later she campaigned for agricultural education for women, and in 1932 for all villages to have services of a midwife.[11] Lady Clinton challenged the idea of separate spheres for women and men when in 1925 she put forward a petition to the DAC noting that hitherto:

> Men have regarded women's sphere in agriculture as confined very largely to such things as milking the cows, feeding the poultry and attending to the flowers, but a claim is now being put forward for a hostel for female students at Seal Hayne Agricultural College.

Claims were also being made for a female chief horticultural officer, a woman lecturer in clean milk production and another as poultry instructress. Miss Gunnell had been employed as Devon County Council horticultural superintendent in 1920. In 1929, DFWI asked for her to work full time instructing WIs on domestic horticulture and food production, and this happened by 1930.[12]

While Lady Clinton was based in East Devon, Miss Calmady-Hamlyn, chairman until 1924, was from Dartmoor. She brought a wealth of experience on the Council of the Devon Agricultural Association, an MBE for her work as secretary and organiser for the Women's War DAC and as a first Devon women JP. Lady Clinton said 'it was chiefly through her [Miss Calmady-Hamlyn's] efforts that they had WIs in Devon'.[13] Daughter of an Okehampton landowner, Miss Calmady-Hamlyn employed servants, ran a stud and attended pony shows. She resigned because she wanted the WI to represent everyone (and Julia Neville suggests, not simply the needs of the county gentry families like the Fulfords, Luttrells, Peeks and her own family).

From 1924, Miss Fulford of Woodbury in East Devon became honorary secretary of the DFWI, a post she held for decades (see under Woodbury WI below), reinforcing WI links to East Devon.

By 1922 there was a WI voluntary organiser for East Devon, Miss Dickinson, who arranged an exhibition at RAMM of East Devon work by WIs, including leather work and Honiton lace. There were then twenty-six East Devon Institutes of which seventeen took part.[14] The judges included two members of County Council staff, Miss Davis and Miss Gunnell, and an address was given by Cecil King, of the Directory of Rural Industries Intelligence Bureau.

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[11] *Western Morning News*, 25 November 1932.

[12] *Westminster Gazette,* 29 August 1925, p. 6; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 13 September 1929. On the career of the appointed Chief Horticultural Officer, Miss Gunnell, see P. Bayer, 'Miss Edna Gunnell and the Women Gardener Movement', *Journal of the Devon Gardens Trust,* 2023, and Lynne Thompson, 'Agricultural Education in the Interwar Years' in *The English Countryside Between the Wars*, pp. 53–72, p. 69.

[13] *Western Times*, 17 June 1921, p. 8.

[14] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 29 April 1922.

Miss Dickinson spoke at Otterton's AGM in 1924. She had previous experience as a central registrar for women wanting to do war work, and as secretary of the Devon Women's War Service Committee; by March 1917 she had resigned as secretary and accepted a post as co-operating officer for agriculture under the Ministry of Labour.[15] She was elected to the Devon County War Agricultural Committee in September 1979.[16]

Case Studies of East Devon Institutes

Cullompton and the Culm Valley Group

Cullompton WI formed in February 1917 as part of the war effort to feed the population. The Parish Council called a meeting to encourage pig and poultry keeping, suggesting a depot to supply pig and poultry feeding stuffs, operated for and by WI members. This was followed by a special meeting in connection with the local War Savings Committee, addressed by Miss Castell, HMI, Exeter.[17]

In May 1917, another practical project began: establishment of a communal kitchen so that people in the town would not go hungry. At the opening in May 1917 by Billie Walrond (of the Walronds, Fore Street, Cullompton), the vicar, Rev Phillips, reported that this was the third communal kitchen in Devon. A cooperation between the local War Savings Committee and the WI under the presidency of Mrs Gidleigh, it offered hot meat on Thursdays and cold meat the following day. Wild and cultivated fruit was to be made into jam and sold, and other fruit would be preserved.[18] In June 1917, a small cooperative society was started for fruit bottling and preserving, with sixteen members holding 2s 6d shares.[19]

By October 1917 a request for a grant from the County Education Department to wipe out the Communal Kitchen Committee's debt was refused on the basis that many others were in the same boat.[20] Nonetheless, the kitchen continued and from January 1918 moved to the old Manor House (today's Manor House Hotel), distributing dinners for 6d and soup for 4d a quart. As the utensils needed had been moved to Bradninch by the County Education Authority, Sir Frederick Upcott, whose family had owned the Manor House for centuries previously, provided a donation to re-equip the kitchen.[21] The kitchen was so popular that membership was dropped. Mrs Gidley reported: 'The Kitchen is entirely self-supporting; no profits; no charity; rich and poor are welcomed, and treated alike.' Over 3,000 dinners of roast or boiled meat with vegetables had been served since May 1917.[22]

An article in *The Landswoman* clearly describes their initiative in a kitchen in an [unnamed] old Elizabethan manor house in Devon, with the choice of takeaway or eating in 'a wonderful dining room'. The president, whose idea it was, was the doctor's wife.[23] It was proposed to collect local food for pigs, the keeping of pigs being strongly urged by the Food Controller.

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[15] *Western Times*, 19 November 1915; *Western Times*, 6 May 1916; *Western Times*, 13 May 1916; *Western Times*, 17 March 1917.
[16] *Western Times*, 22 September 1917.
[17] *The Landswoman,* 1 July 1918, p. 22.
[18] *Western Times,* 11 May 1917, p. 5.
[19] *The Landswoman,* 1 July 1918, p. 22.
[20] *Western Times,* 5 October 1917, p. 7.
[21] *Western Times,* 18 January 1918, p. 9.
[22] *Western Times,* 16 January 1918, p. 2; 1914 *Kelly's Directory*.
[23] 'The Working of a Women's Institute in Devon: Food Saving in a Market Town', *The Landswoman,* 1 May 1918.

Communal jam making and fruit bottling was planned, to save fuel, sugar and labour. A poignant note linked the communal kitchen to the war effort: 'they will tell you how many of the Devon's were killed in action last October and they have no intention of losing the war on the home front'.

After the war, the WI branch provided education on matters supporting the rural economy while also providing recreation and enlivening life in a small rural town. There was a fruit and flower show with poultry in the parish rooms in 1920; a visit to Upton House, home of Mr and Mrs Burrow, where 250 members enjoyed tea and the town band, in 1921; a show in the Victoria Hall in 1923 displayed leather goods, skins and gloves reflecting local industries (the work of Hallet Brothers, leather dressers and glove manufacturers). 1923 had an outing to Weston super Mare, and a scheme where members brought a garment to dispose of with the WI taking 1d for every shilling raised. Lady Clinton addressed the branch in 1925, mentioning that Cullompton was the oldest WI in Devon, before (as was often her custom) singing two humorous songs.[24] In 1927, a carnival included tableaux on the theme of 'Links to Empire'. Key personnel were Mrs Gidley, president from 1917 to 1923, and from 1926 Mrs E.R. May, a parish councillor, as vice president.

Mrs Constance Mary Gidley (née Saunders) was born c. 1860 in Kensington, daughter of a surgeon dentist, Josiah Saunders.[25] Her first marriage to a Mr Lucas brought one child, William Francis Lucas. By the 1891 Census, her husband had died and she headed her own household in Burnham, Somerset, living on her own means with her mother and son, age 2, a servant and cook.

In 1895 she married again. Gustavus George Gidley (d.1938 aged 76) was a physician who grew up in Honiton, where his father, also Gustavus, was a merchant. From before 1914, Constance and her husband lived at Heyford House, Cullompton, where Gustavus remained in practice for many years, becoming member of the Royal College of Surgeons, licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, medical officer and public vaccinator for Cullompton, Butterleigh and Kentisbeare. He worked for the Tiverton Union and was a certifying factory surgeon.[26] The couple had one employee and five female servants in a house with twenty rooms.

Mrs Gidleigh became a prominent local figure in Cullompton. She used her private means to set up The Cullompton Weavers in 1911, with both a shop and a separate workshop in a former workhouse building where disabled people produced woven goods, including silks, woven durable stockings and other garments 'at a most moderate cost'. By 1914, the workshop also produced hand weaving and knitting.[27] The *London Evening Standard* commented on her reintroduction of the ancient art of weaving as an example of the revival of village industries in Devon.[28] In 1921, The Weavers employed 300 people.[29]

Mrs Gidleigh was president of the Cullompton Arts and Crafts Society and secretary of the Devon Arts and Crafts Association,[30] which may partially explain why in 1918 the

[24]*Western Times,* 5 June 1925.
[25]She was 60 at the time of the 1921 Census.
[26]*The Medical Dictionary*, 1935.
[27]*Kelly's Directory*, 1914.
[28]*London Evening Standard*, 19 July 1913; *Pall Mall Gazette,* 14 January 1914; *Vote,* 17 October 1913, p. 5.
[29]1921 Census.
[30]*Western Morning News,* 27 October 1916, p. 6.

Cullompton Arts and Crafts Society amalgamated with the WI.[31] The WI was clearly important to her on a personal level as at her silver wedding anniversary she and Mr Gidley celebrated by meeting members and friends in the WI.[32]

The Culm Valley WI Group was established by 1926, linking Cullompton, Uffculme, Culmstock, Kenstisbeare and Halberton.[33] It planned a fete at Poynings, Uffculme, home of Colonel and Mrs Jaffe, who was assistant secretary to the DFWI.[34] Colonel Jaffe (b. c. 1886) grew and exhibited vegetables, kept cattle and pedigree stock and was described on his death as 'a man of fine physique and a passionate follower of hunting in the district', whose favourite hunter was to be shot in accord with his wishes and the flesh given to the Tiverton Hounds.[35] While her husband grew vegetables, Mrs Jaffe (b. c. 1887) entered in the local show tomatoes, begonias, gladioli, flower arrangements, running honey and section honey. Her role was described in the 1921 Census as 'home duties': six servants worked for the Col and Mrs Jaffe and their one son – a groom-chauffeur, cook, nurse, housemaid, parlour maid and between maid.

Culmstock WI was addressed by Mrs Jaffe at the 1926 inaugural meeting, and early meetings drew on talent within the group, with folk dancing from Uffculme which led to setting up of a Culmstock team, and a talk on amateur theatricals from Mrs Dashwood of Kentisbeare. Mrs Rutley of Cullompton spoke on making soft toys, and Mrs Phillips came from Honiton to speak on the law affecting women and children. Alongside raffia work classes there was a debate on 'Do we wear too many clothes?' and whist drives, garden parties at Tapscott House and lectures by Nurse Moore on home nursing. A party laid on for old parishioners enjoyed 'Mrs Jarling's waxworks',[36] songs, dances and recitations. In 1928, volunteers were requested to fund cocoa for school children whose parents could not afford it in winter.

Kentisbeare WI held a garden fete at Croyle house, residence of Major and Mrs Dashwood, in 1926, opened by Lady Clinton who congratulated members on their Shakespearian acting at Plymouth.[37] Major Dashwood was involved in hunting, selling a child's Dartmoor gelding as a 'good hunter'.[38] Mrs Dashwood, president of Kentisbeare WI, was a WI voluntary county organiser,[39] stood for and was co-opted onto the national executive committee in 1925–26[40] (the first representative from the South West) and was on the DFWI committee in 1928.[41] An author of fiction under the pen name E.M. Delafield, she wrote about the WI in her *Diary of a Provincial Lady and* in 1925 autographed copies of her latest novel *Mrs Harter*.[42] She lectured, e.g. to Budleigh Salterton, on 'Devon Writers and Literature'.

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[31]*The Landswoman,* 1 July 1918, p. 22.

[32]*Western Times,* 20 April 1920.

[33]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 18 June 1926, p. 15*; Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 8 April 1927, p. 12.

[34]*Western Times,* 23 May 1924.

[35]*Western Times,* 2 December 1927.

[36]This may have been an amateur dramatic production influenced by G.B. Bartlett's 'Mrs Jarley's Far-Famed Collection of Waxworks', 1873, a guidebook for amateur theatricals. Mrs Jarley was a character from Dickens *Old Curiosity Shop*, a proprietor of travelling waxworks. Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks and a Jolly Jumble of Jests, Christmas 1903' *From the Archivist's Notebook* <https://nataliavogeikoff.com/2022/06/19/mrs-jarleys-waxworks-and-a-jolly-jumble-of-jests-christmas-1903> [accessed 18 April 2024].

[37]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 28 June 1926.

[38]*Western Morning News,* 27 March 1935.

[39]Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism,* p. 109.

[40]DHC 1618G/WB/OT Otterton minute book, 17 March 1925; *Western Times*, 19 November 1926.

[41]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 23 November 1928.

[42]*Western Times,* 1 May 1925, p. 4; *Western Times,* 1 May 1925.

The Exmouth/Budleigh/Littleham Group

The Exmouth branch began in May 1919 in order 'to provide something to take the place of the various war-work depots, where women met and had pleasant intercourse, which was greatly missed when the depots were closed.'[43] A room was secured in Lloyds Bank, Rolle Street, where lessons in cookery and dressmaking were held as well as a University extension lecture course on 'Chemistry in Everyday Life'. Every Saturday was a WI sale of toys and fancy needlework; there were also debates – such as 'is it better to over or under estimate oneself?'[44]The branch affiliated with the Women's Citizenship League and by December 1919, the Exmouth WI Centre had 400 members, and staged lectures, debates and music.[45] A 1922 address focussed on beauty in the home, decorations and arranging furniture economically.

In 1926, the WI was fundraising for a new building, which would 'be a rallying point for the neighbouring village Institutes'– it had occupied the old police station at the back of the church hall on South Street, which was about to be demolished.[46] In 1927, new 'comfortable and homely' premises were established above the National Provincial Bank in Rolle Street, with a roof garden with views of surrounding hills.[47] Before 1925, Exmouth became a nationally recognised centre to serve the surrounding rural area affiliated to Lympstone, Woodbury, Littleham, Otterton and Budleigh WIs,[48] whose members were encouraged to make use of the WI Centre in Exmouth.[49] The relationship was conceived by Lady Clinton in feminine terminology, who told the branch that Exmouth did its duty as a 'Mother Institute' by allowing neighbouring institutes to use the rest room.[50]

The initial committee included Lady Clinton, Mrs Williams (treasurer), Mrs Thornycroft, Mrs Fred Horne,[51] Mrs Wadmore and Miss Fearon.[52] Lady Clinton's interest in the WI seems to have been sparked by local women such as Miss Agnes Pritchard and Clinton who joined the Exmouth Committee when founded in 1919.[53] At an Exmouth WI meeting in 1921 it was reported 'Lady Clinton (hon secretary) liked to think she's helped start this branch'[54] and Lady Clinton herself said she had helped form three WI in her own immediate neighbourhood (Exmouth, Littleham and Budleigh).[55]

In 1925, Budleigh Salterton WI took an annual picnic to Torquay with tea at Dellers Café, Paignton and another picnic to Black Hill by charabanc with tea, blackberrying and games.

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[43]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 8 January 1920.
[44]*Western Times,* 15 December 1919.
[45]*Western Times,* 15 December 1919. The Women's Citizenship League may be a reference to the National Union for Equal Citizenship, which was the new name of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies from 1919.
[46]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 12 January 1926.
[47]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 8 April 1927, p. 12.
[48]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 11 May 1928.
[49]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 15 May 1930; *Westminster Gazette*, 25 October 1930.
[50]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 7 May 1924, p. 5.
[51]A Frederick Horne was a sailmaker, aged 34, in the 1911 Census, residing at Withycombe Raleigh.
[52]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 8 January 1920.
[53]Neville and Turnbull, *op cit.*
[54]*Western Times*, 8 July 1921, p. 8.
[55]*Western Times*, 12 June 1920.

They supported the County Council Health Week with talks on 'What the State does for us', and advocacy for dustbins. Demonstrations included Smyrna Rugs. Other talks included beekeeping for women, and Mrs Dashwood on Devon writers. At the 1925 Christmas party, a company of Pierrots entertained.

In 1922, Littleham WI held a garden fete at Glyde Mallen, home of Miss Thornhill, fundraising for a hut.[56] Similarly, in 1925, there was fundraiser for the hut at the garden of the president Mrs C.F. Hutton at Freelands, Littleham Cross.[57]

There is more evidence of interest in the female vote in the Exmouth WI than in other branches. April Marjoram suggests that in the post-war period, Exmouth women were active in organisations such as the WI. Many of the women involved in setting up the National Federation of WIs in 1915 had been active in the women's suffrage movement and she argues that they saw the WIs as a means of encouraging and educating women to take an active part in public life.[58]

In November 1919, at one if its first meetings, Exmouth WI hosted a speech on 'The Vote and its Responsibilities' by Miss Olive Hepburn.[59] Olive was present at a formative meeting of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Exeter, was on the Executive Committee of Exeter NUWSS and was an active Liberal.[60] Anstice Fearon, a president of Exmouth WI, had been a former member of the Exmouth NUWSS.[61] A curate's daughter, she became a school teacher, moving in 1915 to Exmouth as a principal of Southlands School. She joined the Exmouth branch of the NUWSS soon after taking up residency at Southlands and was on the committee; she hosted an address by Mrs [Millicent] Fawcett, NUWSS president, at the school. (She also encouraged the recreational aspect of the WI, in 1922 inviting the WI to a lecture on Morris and folk dance, where pupils of Southlands School gave exhibitions of dances and singing games).[62] Another link with suffrage ideas was that Grace Retallack of Exmouth was a close friend of Miss Calmady-Hamlyn (DFWI chairman), whose sister Joan was secretary of Exmouth NUWSS from its formation in 1912.[63]

Woodbury and Lympstone Groups

Lady Clinton described Woodbury as one of the first WIs in Devon and a model one, which contributed generously to the DFWI and national headquarters.[64] The influence of Miss Blanche A. Fulford (b. 1876) of the Priory, Woodbury is apparent.[65] She was on the women's

[56] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 17 June 1922, p. 4.
[57] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 23 July 1925.
[58] April Marjoram *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Exmouth* (Exmouth Historical and Archaeological Society, 2018), p. 8.
[59] Marjoram, *op. cit.*; *Western Times*, 18 November 1919.
[60] Julia Neville, 'Hepburn, Miss Olive', *Devon History Society* (November 2018) <https://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/hepburn-miss-olive> [accessed 18 April 2024].
[61] Marjoram, *op. cit.*; April Marjoram 'Fearon, Miss Anstice', *Devon History Society* (June 2018) <https://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/fearon-miss-anstice> [accessed 18 April 2024].
[62] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 11 March 1922.
[63] April Marjoram, 'Retallack, Miss Joan', Devon History Society (June 2018) <https://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/retallack-miss-joan> [accessed 19 April 2024]; article by Julia Neville re. Calmady Hamlyn.
[64] *Western Times,* 13 June 1924, p. 10.
[65] Name and address of the Secretary of DFWI given in minutes of Buckland Monachorum WI Sol 2, 1922–24.

branch of the DAC in 1919, which considered the proposal to create WIs in Devon[66] and from 1924 was secretary of DFWI for decades. She represented Woodbury and Lympstone in early meetings and was honorary secretary of Woodbury WI for decades.[67]

A sister of Rev J.L.L. Fulford, in 1911 she and sister Mary, lived at the Priory, Woodbury with two servants. Blanche had private means. They were at the Priory at the time of the 1921 Census, carrying out 'home duties' with their brother and two servants, a cook and a house parlour maid. As DFWI secretary, Blanche gave talks to WI branches such as Tedburn St Mary in 1929 on whose committee she sat,[68] and advised new branches, such as Otterton in 1924. In 1927, she spoke at the home of Mrs Douglas Hamilton in North Devon and 'gave much valuable information'.[69] In 1928, deep gratitude was expressed for the voluntary assistance of Miss Fulford for the DFWI alongside paid officers such as Miss Davis and the horticultural officer, Miss Gunnell.[70]

Lympstone WI formed in November 1919 with Miss Howard presiding.[71] The 1923 AGM reported in the past year lectures on pottery, and 'Women's Clothing' by Dr Darbyshire[72] and 'How the Hoe can help the school' by Miss Watkins. On an outing to Fingle Bridge they were entertained by Mr and Mrs Marshall at the Grange with an address by Lady Clinton and plays by Girl Guides and Brownies.

Otterton WI was active by 1924 when Miss Fulford gave hints on how to hold meetings and committee members were invited to attend a meeting in Exmouth and officially joined the Exmouth group. The Institute subscribed to Boots Library, receiving 100 books for £10 per annum. Demonstrations included glove making, fruit bottling, folk dancing and classes started in dressmaking, soft leather work and decorative stitching.

Alphington, Ide and Holcombe Burnell Groups

The Alphington branch (then considered part of East Devon by the WI) opened in November 1919 with useful talks and demonstrations on saving money through hay box cookery, slipper making, how to liven a shabby hat into a new one, and an apple dunking raffle. External speakers in 1920 were Miss Smith MBE on maternity and child welfare, Mrs Nugent Harris on the WI, and instruction on pickle and sauce-making by Miss Sack. There was a wild flower competition, a whist drive raised money for a piano for the branch and a competition on best dish of six cooked potatoes. At a gathering at the Rectory, Frieda Rowe gave 'pleasing items in broad Devon' [dialect] and children danced. In 1921 the branch asked permission from Sir Trehawke Kekewich (of Peamore House) to use his grounds for a picnic. Miss Gunnell gave a demonstration of decorations and judged a competition for best piece of polished silver and copper.

[66] *Western Times,* 26 April 1919, p. 4.
[67] *Western Times,* 13 June 1924, p 10; *Western Times*, 17 October 1941.
[68] *Western Times,* 1 February 1929.
[69] *North Devon Journal*, 7 July 1927.
[70] *Western Times,* 23 November 1928, p. 16.
[71] *Western Times,* 7 November 1919, p. 6.
[72] Dr Darbyshire was local doctor in Woodbury and Holystone, president of the Devon Pigeon Racing Club and an active Conservative. Miss Watkins was a representative of the NFWI (*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 11 February 1927).

Mrs Bennett, president of Alphington WI, was married to the Rev BC Bennett, rector to Alphington. Mrs Wippell (d. 1925),WI secretary in 1920, was widow of Mr T Wippell, who for many years carried out a tannery business in Alphington. Her funeral was conducted by Rev Bennett. The Wippells employed servants; in 1882 they advertised for a respectable girl, and in 1907 for a cook. A later secretary, Mrs Copp of Montego, Alphington, employed servants and was active in the SW Group of Liberals.

Honiton and the Ottery Groups

The Honiton branch, inaugurated in November 1923,[73] held lectures on subjects from the more traditional gardening and poultry keeping to laws and bills affecting women. Initially the president was the Hon Mrs Courtenay, whose other interests included good works, drama and production of pageant plays.[74]

In 1924 Mrs T Phillips was President of the Honiton branch when Lady Clinton spoke on the ideals of the movement – friendliness, perseverance, helpfulness, cheerfulness, loyalty and fellow citizenship.[75]

In 1927, the Honiton branch, presided over by Mrs Phillips, invited surrounding WIs to join in an entertainment evening. Newton Poppleford, Ottery St Mary, Sidford, Tipton St John and Honiton all contributed songs, recitations, scenes from the *Taming of the Shrew* and Widecombe Fair.[76] Acting in Devon dialect was popular. Under the banner the 'Ottery Group of WIs', the same villages contributed to an exhibition at Honiton,[77] and Ottery WI invited Newton Poppleford, Thorverton and Silverton WIs to take part in a sale of home produce and handicraft.[78]

Whimple WI (3 miles from Ottery St Mary), active from 1920 onwards, was a lively branch with weekly folk dancing, a WI Jazz Brigade conducted by the president, Mrs Granger[79] alongside good works – sending eggs to the RDE Hospital and large boxes of primroses to London hospitals.[80] The branch was involved in a school dinners scheme.[81] The very rural nature of this branch is suggested when some women kept away from a meeting for late hay-making.[82]

In 1930, Sidford WI had a fête in the grounds of Sid Abbey by permission of Major General Carew Hunt. Mrs H. Pike was president and folk dance teams displayed from Sidford, Ottery St Mary, Newton Poppleford and Beer.[83]

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[73]*Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 25 January 1924 .
[74]*Western Morning News,* 12 April 1928.
[75]*Western Morning News,* 19 January 1924.
[76]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 20 May 1927.
[77]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 13 May 1927.
[78]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 20 November 1930.
[79]Possibly wife of W Granger, a builder.
[80]*Western Times*, 16 April 1926; *Western Morning News*, 22 November 1924.
[81]*Western Times*, 25 March 1927; 16 April 1926; *Western Morning News* 22 November 1924; *Western Times* 1 August 1924.
[82]*Western Times*, 1 August 1924.
[83]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 13 June 1930.

In 1928, Mrs T. Phillips was President of Honiton WI and Miss J.M. Hellier Secretary. Mrs T. Phillips was another name of Juanita Phillips (1880–1965), born in Chile, daughter of a director of a company that mined nitrates. She married the solicitor Thomas Phillips, who had been a student at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where Juanita's eldest brother, Henry, was a don. They lived at Sudbury Lawn, Honiton High Street from 1906 to c.1950.[84] She had been active in the suffrage movement, a member of the more militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). In 1910 she set up a public meeting in Honiton with Amy Montague of the WSPU speaking. She took part in a 1911 meeting at Axminster in support of women's suffrage at the George Hotel, Axminster: in the chair was Mrs Montague of Crediton, supported by Mrs Phillips of Honiton and Maud Joachim.[85] She was also present at the Royal Clarence Hotel when Mrs Pankhurst visited Exeter. Julia Neville concludes that Phillips was serious about wanting women to achieve more self-fulfilment and saw WIs as a good tool for this. In 1920 she became Honiton's first woman councillor, then first woman JP, first woman mayor (she was mayor eleven times in all), first woman alderman in 1928 and first woman Devon County Councillor in 1931. She was made a freeman of the borough of Honiton in 1938, first woman chair of a county council committee in 1941 and first woman county alderman in 1946. During the Second World War, she served as Devon County Director of the Women's Voluntary Service and is on the Women's Local Government Society's national list of 100 suffrage pioneers.

Miss Jessie Mary Hellier (b. 1900) came from an established family of Honiton solicitors. Her father was Edward William Hellier, Honiton Town clerk, clerk to the Honiton Board of Guardians, the Rural District Council and Commissioners of Taxes for Axminster District. He lived with wife Mary at Carlton House, Honiton. Although not a qualified solicitor, Miss Hellier took full advantage of the opportunities her background offered. In 1921 she worked as a private secretary in London for C.M. Eldrid Scott Esq. at 2 Dean's Yard, London SW1.[86] She came from London to help her father in his work for a few years before his death. In 1928 she was appointed clerk to the Honiton Guardians, for her exceptional ability and knowledge of the work, the third generation of her family to occupy the post.[87] The salary was £180 per annum. Until 1930, Miss J.M. Hellier of Honiton, Devonshire, was the only female superintendent registrar in England and Wales (in 1930 another was appointed – Miss Busby in Fulham).[88] In 1931, she was to also cover for a vacant clerkship at Plympton, working out of Exeter, and to be paid an extra £100 to cover travel and extra duties.[89] In 1932, when she left to become chief clerk to the central office of the County Public Assistance Committee, she was described as an 'excellent clerk'.[90]

Broadhembury Group, Near Honiton

Mrs Cedric Drewe of Broadhembury House was president of Broadhembury WI and, in traditional mode, wife of a principal landowner. Cedric Drewe (1891–1971) was

[84]DHS Suffrage database, entry by Julia Neville. See also 1921 Census.
[85]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 9 March 1911, p. 3.
[86]1921 Census.
[87]*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 3 August 1928; *Boston Guardian,* 4 August 1928, p. 10.
[88]*Vote*, 11 April 1930, p. 1.
[89]*Western Morning News,* 27 October 1931.
[90]*Western Times,* 23 September 1932.

Conservative MP for South Molton in 1924 and then Honiton from 1931.[91] In 1923, the young branch held an old English fayre in the grounds of their home, including a musical sketch on 'The Jumble Sale', which caused endless laughter, maypole dancing and games.[92] In 1927, Broadhembury WI had a health talk by Dr Dewhurst.[93] In 1930, the branch put on a 'daring experiment' for three nights – an operetta, which was to be repeated at Plymtree and Feniton.[94]

The vice president was Miss Edith Gardner (b. 1879), daughter of Fred Gardner, who in the 1911 Census was 60, living on private means at Foxbeare, Broadhembury. Fred and wife Elizabeth had three daughters and two sons, one with private means and the other an Indian wing lieutenant. The household also included two servants, one a sick nurse. Embedded in rural life, Fred had been a farmer in 1881 with his father-in-law employing five men and two boys. He was a churchwarden. By 1916, Edith seems to have been the daughter who remained at home with her father when they together attended the funeral of the Lord of the Manor of Broadhembury, Lieutenant Col. Grundy who had a 2,000 acre estate.

Her mother Elizabeth was secretary of the Mothers' Union and keenly interested in the Devon Bird Watching Association. In 1924, Miss Gardner came second in the cake competition at the Mothers' Union festival when the Bishop of Exeter extolled mothers as the salt of the spiritual world with a special duty to concern themselves with the behaviour and guidance of their daughters.[95] In the national elections in 1929, she was a seconder for Sir C. Morrison-Bell, the Conservative candidate.[96]

Axminster Group

Mrs Gidley of Cullompton visited Axminster on 6 September 1920 to discuss formation of an Axminster WI and on 24 September the inaugural meeting was held with thirty members, chaired by Mrs Fownes Luttrell. In 1921, in the Cinema Hall, Axminster, Lady Clinton addressed seventy members on the ideals of the WI movement (friendliness, perseverance, perfection in work, unselfish sisterhood) and sang a song at the piano in Irish brogue. In March 1922, Mrs Fownes Luttrell spoke to the Axminster WI on 'Local Government and Women's Vote'. The president was initially Miss Stafford, with Mrs C. Fownes Luttrell vice president. By 1925, Mrs Luttrell was president, and Miss Stafford and Mrs S. G. Nicholls were vice presidents. In 1927, Mrs Robertson was vice president.

Mrs Luttrell was wife of Major A. C. Fownes Luttrell of Lee Coombe House,[97] a member of the landed gentry with a pedigree. He was part of the Axminster Conservative Association and deputy ruling councillor of the Seaton branch of the Primrose League.[98] WI members

[91] *Westminster Gazette*, 26 April 1924.
[92] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 11 July 1923, p. 7.
[93] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,* 20 May 1927.
[94] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 20 May 1927.
[95] *Western Morning News,* 21 June 1924.
[96] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 21 May 1929.
[97] 'Alexander Fownes Luttrell' *National Trust* <www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/726126> [accessed 19 April 2024]; *The Luttrells* <www.theluttrells.com/Pedigree_of_Fownes_Luttrells_of_Dunster_Castle.html> [accessed 19 April 2024].
[98] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 29 May 1928.

attended an open air whist drive and tea on the lawn at Lee Combe House in 1927.[99] Mrs Luttrell gave the local branch a framed copy of 'Jerusalem' for the Meeting Place.[100]

Branch activities included a Christmas party for 150 members with sketches and entertainment for children, lectures on fruit bottling and dressmaking, garden parties, charabanc outings and picnics. The branch addressed current issues: in 1925 a resolution was passed in favour of women police in Devon,[101] and members collected funds for National Savings Certificates in 1926 and supported the Axminster Cottage Hospital. [102] In 1929, the Axminster WI Group exhibition had a display of Point and Honiton lace, including a cooperative quilt made by eight Branscombe members, where lace was still a chief industry.[103]

Topsham Group

Topsham WI heard a talk in 1922 on 'How Our Minds Influence Our Lives', opening up 'glorious possibilities' at Raleigh Hall when Mrs Halliday was president.[104] In 1927, they met at Broadway House, home of Mrs Worsley, the secretary, with a lecture on upholstery, games and tea.

In 1928, Mrs Wimbush was president. She lived with Dr Wimbush at Altamira and was involved with the Girl Guides and the Conservative party. In 1929, she gave a talk to Budleigh Salterton WI on Exeter Cathedral.

By the AGM in January 1929, Mrs Michelmore, a solicitor's wife, was president and in an example of cooperation lent her wireless so that the meeting could listen to a bulletin on the King's health. The Michelmores lent Grove Hill house garden for WI fetes, at one of which Miss Annie Swain lent her gramophone to enable folk dancing.[105]

Ms Chesnutt, hon secretary for Topsham WI, lived at 26 The Strand and had marched on the Great Suffrage Pilgrimage in 1913. She was active in St Margaret's church and supported Topsham Scouts and Guides. During the First World War she had been a volunteer nurse at Topsham Hospital.[106]

Conclusions

1. How Far Did the East Devon Branches Meet the 1919 Objectives?

Stimulation of interest in agricultural industry: From Cullompton's schemes for pig rearing in the war years to widespread ongoing lectures (often by Devon County Council lecturers) to promote cottage gardening or growing vegetables, flowers and soft fruit, keeping

[99] *Western Times*, 22 July 1927.
[100] *Western Times*, 4 November 1927.
[101] *Western Morning News*, 19 February 1925.
[102] *Western Times*, 22 January 1926.
[103] *Western Times,* 1 March 1929.
[104] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 3 May 1922, p. 6.
[105] *Western Times*, 10 May 1929; *Western Times*, 11 January 1929.
[106] Sheila Stephens and Julia Neville, 'Chesnutt, Miss Florence', *Devon History Society* <www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/chesnutt-miss-florence> [accessed 19 April 2024].

poultry, and sale of local produce, this objective was a continued one. At policy level, Lady Clinton argued on behalf of the DFWI for Devon County Council to train women in agriculture. Lynne Thompson argues that the NFWI nationally redefined agriculture for women as a way to encompass the rural domestic economy with agricultural education for women linked to the household economy.[107] This approach is found in East Devon in the detail of WI education classes.

The promotion of education: This generally was very successful, with lectures and debates on a wide range of topics a normal part of branch life. Brassley et al. describe the WIs nationally as spectacularly successful with an extensive network of lectures and short courses, initially about domestic science and food production but after the First World War including music, drama, history and international relations, with adult education closely linked to leisure.[108] In East Devon there was a particular emphasis on home economics, e.g. women's clothing, cookery, jam making, gardening, poultry keeping and the role of chemistry in home economics. Lectures also pushed some boundaries for women on the vote and the power of the mind. They introduced rural women to culture including opera, Shakespeare and the value of Devon dialect.

To be characteristic of place and people: While a uniform approach to meetings developed with talks or demonstrations, competitions, games and tea, in accord with the national format, nonetheless there were different local emphases between branches. At the start of the movement, for example, Cullompton had displays of traditional local industries of leather goods and gloves, Axminster and Branscombe displayed Honiton lace, and Exmouth explicitly sought a replacement for women to be in contact following closure of war depots. Some villages specialised in drama, others in music, with jazz at Whimple and opera at Broadhembury.

The revival of old industries: This seems to have been dropped during the decade. Nationally, craft work was seen as part of home industry and a way to earn money.[109] Mrs Gidleigh of Cullompton was already credited with pursuing this aim at Cullompton Weavers before the WI formed. However, craft work and its sale was a strong theme, and the Axminster group had a display of Point and Honiton lacemaking in 1929, which continued to be a chief industry in Branscombe.

Cooperation with the Education Authority: This was successful, with talks by Devon County Officers such as Miss Gunnell, Devon County Council (DCC) horticultural officer and Miss Davis, Devon CC instructress, and speakers from the DCC list such as Dr Date, deputy county medical officer.

WIs often did succeed in being **cooperative enterprises** in which women helped each other in many ways – from the Cullompton pig and poultry schemes and communal food kitchen to the loan of gramophone and wireless by Topsham members, from a thrift club set up at Woodbury WI in 1922 to a cooperative quilt made by members of the Axminster group.[110]

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[107]Thompson, 'Agricultural Education in the Interwar Years', in *The English Countryside Between The Wars: Regeneration or Decline?* ed. Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burkhardt, Lynne Thompson (Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 53–73.

[108]*Ibid.*, p. 44, pp. 236-8.

[109]Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, p. 111.

[110]*Western Times*, 1 March 1929.

Nationally, WIs borrowed the idea from the Friendly Societies that all members should pay the same fee to prevent undue influence by wealthy members. Cooperation between institutes in groups was encouraged by county organisers and appears to have worked in East Devon, with branch presidents often giving talks to other branches.[111]

A social side with dancing and folk song: This was very successful. Through carnivals, fêtes, outings, humorous songs and entertainment evenings, the WI very definitely provided places where women could get out of the home, meet together and have fun, while also keeping local traditions alive. In addition, there were some limited policy discussions from the branches, with more from Lady Clinton and attempts to influence policy.

Did the WI objectives change during the 1920s? While no change to the stated objectives has been found, by the end of the 1920s there was a change of emphasis and tone. Initially, the WIs nationally carried a legacy of the First World War and their contribution to food growing and preservation, with attention given to the wages and training of those in these industries and a focus on gardens and allotments.[112] In East Devon, early explicit references to the war depots and food kitchens are evident at the start of the movement in Cullompton and Exmouth but ceased as the decade progressed. In some regions there was less emphasis on food production into the 1930s and beyond: in Devon, this emphasis continued throughout the 1920s and, as evidenced by the work of Miss Gunnell, into future decades.[113]

2. Who Were the Women Who Led the East Devon WIs and Was There a Link Between Them and the Suffrage Movement?

Leading figures of the East Devon WIs were middle or upper class. Alongside the classic figure of the Lady of the Manor and members of the landed gentry who followed the hunt, were wives or daughters of doctors, rectors and solicitors.

Both Conservative and Liberal were represented. While some women relied on wealthy husbands, their own private means or lived with parents, others were earning their living and even making a mark in history by being a 'first woman' in their field, like Miss Hellier of Honiton, the first female superintendent registrar in England and Wales.

Andrews describes the WI nationally as a significant feminist organisation – the largest women's movement in the post suffrage era. She discusses the idea – which she recognises is imbued in Robertson Scott's 1925 book *The Story of the WI Movement in England and Wales* – that the WI movement was indebted to the feminism of the suffrage movement.[114] The suffrage movement achieved the vote for some women in 1918, and all women over 21 in 1928, and shared with the WI the aim of expanding women's spheres of activity. Some NFWI leaders were active in the suffrage movement.[115] Andrews argues that many women saw the WI as a natural continuation of their suffrage work and that for Liberals, the WIs were an extension of NUWSS-style feminism.[116] John Nugent Harris, whose wife spoke to

[111]Maggie Andrews ,*The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, pp. 48, 62. See 'Budleigh Salterton Programmes in the 1920s' at DHC 1618G/BSN acc 8554 with talks by Mrs Gidley, Mrs Luttrell, Mrs Dashwood and Mrs Wimbush.
[112]Andrews, p. 42.
[113]Andrews, p. 154; Bayer, 'Miss Edna Gunnell', *op. cit.*
[114]Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, pp. 13, 85.
[115]The WI, 'History', <https://www.thewi.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-wi> [accessed 19 April 2024].
[116]Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism*, pp. 70, 101.

the DAC on how to form WIs in Devon, said: 'The suffragists made the pot to boil… the Institute movement showed how some things could be got out of the pot.'[117] Nationally, Lady Denman, NFWI chairman, was daughter of a suffragist, and Grace Hadow, vice chairman, an active suffragist who established Cirencester Suffrage Society. Helen Auerbach, NFWI hon treasurer, had also been hon treasurer of the NUWSS.

There was some crossover between suffrage activists and WI leaders in East Devon in the 1920s, particularly in the urban areas of Exmouth and Honiton. One suffragette and several suffragists were active WI leaders. Miss Anstice Fearon was a former member of the NUWSS and on the Exmouth Committee from inception. In Honiton, Juanita Phillips – formerly of the more militant branch of the suffrage movement, the WSPU – was president of Honiton WI. In Topsham, Miss Chesnutt, who had marched on the Great Suffrage Pilgrimage,[118] was WI hon secretary. Lady Clinton apparently changed her mind and did come to support women's franchise.[119] Miss Calmady-Hamlyn left no traces of suffrage work, though she was close friends of Grace Retallack of Exmouth, whose sister Joan was secretary of Exmouth NUWSS from its formation in 1912.[120]

There was less debate on or overlap with the suffrage than might perhaps have been thought, given the earlier network of the NUWSS in Devon with seventeen active branches by 1913.[121] NUWSS branches were established first in Plymouth and Exeter and then in the market and coastal towns. Suffrage activity tended to struggle in rural areas and can be viewed as primarily urban, while WIs were intended to be primarily rural, and although WI branches were established in market and coastal towns to serve surrounding areas (as described above), there were also WI branches in many villages. In addition, while the NUWSS focussed efforts on influencing elections to secure women's franchise, WIs were explicitly non-political.

After some women had won the vote, the exploration of women's citizenship came to the fore, alongside the campaign for all women to obtain the vote. Nationally, the WI constitution included training in citizenship for newly enfranchised women. As this was not explicitly set in the objectives in Devon it has not been included in this article but is explored further elsewhere.

3. Did the WIs Encourage Separate Spheres for Women?

Andrews notes that the WI movement nationally always had a strong domestic focus but validated women's work in the home as skilled work accompanied by a right to leisure in an all-female group.[122] In Devon, the WI branches encouraged rural women to come out of their houses and meet other women, learn useful things, some of which related to the idea of a domestic woman's sphere in cooking, mending and making clothes, and growing flowers, but some of which also extended members' interests into the wider world, learning fruit pruning

[117]Robertson Scott, *The Story of the Women's Institute Movement* , pp. 39–44 .

[118]On 26 July 1913, 50,000 suffragists and supporters of the NUWSS converged on Hyde Park calling for Votes for Women, the culmination of a five-week national pilgrimage.

[119]Neville and Turnbull, 'Jane Grey Clinton (1863–1953)' , *op. cit.*

[120]April Marjoram, 'Retallack, Miss Joan', Devon History Society (June 2018) <https://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/retallack-miss-joan> [accessed 19 April 2024].

[121]Penny Bayer, 'The Contribution of NUWSS Organisers in Devon to the Campaign for Women's Suffrage', *The Devon Historian*, pp. 53–68, 65.

[122]Andrews, pp. 15, 34.

and vegetable growing (which had tended to be a male area), travel, national insurance, debates about women's role, and women's franchise.

Rather than share space with other users, there was a definite focus on creating WI huts or rooms where members had their own space. The idea that it was a good thing that the Exmouth WI premises were homely, and a manifestation of the duty of a Mother Institute, suggests an extension of the domestic sphere out into the world. As Andrews has postulated nationally, in Devon the WIs can be seen as creating a female cultural space for leisure, learning useful or pleasurable skills with both modernist and traditional elements.

In conclusion, some East Devon women took significant positions at county level, within the DFWI. The East Devon WI branches met national objectives and were particularly active and successful in education, including agriculture and horticulture, with very good cooperation with the County Education Authority. Some valued cooperative enterprises were set up, particularly related to the war and its aftermath. Revival of old industries was also less evident as the decade progressed. There were more policy discussions at county level than within branches, and less overlap than might have been thought with the suffrage movement, perhaps because the latter was primarily urban while the WIs were rural. East Devon WIs did encourage separate spheres for women, notwithstanding extension of members' interests into wider topics including some discussion of citizenship. They provided an important space in which rural women could extend knowledge, build social relationships and learn how to take part in organisations.

Thanks: *Julia Neville, Carole Shaw, Jane Campbell*

DHC records consulted (not always extant for 1920s): DHC 1618G/WB/ for Alphington, Axminster, Broadhembury, Buckland Monachorum, Budleigh Salterton, Cullompton, Culmstock, Lydford, Otterton and Topsham.