

2016 NFWI ANNUAL MEETING
THE BRIGHTON CENTRE, BRIGHTON
SARUDAY, 11 JUNE 2016

Travelling from Devon on Friday to Brighton we arrived in the early afternoon, Jean and I went on the Hop-on, Hop-off bus for a tour around Brighton, seeing many of the local sights. On Saturday we made our way to the Brighton Centre, along with WI members from federations around the country.

Janice Langley, the NFWI Chair welcomed everyone and after singing Jerusalem we sang Happy Birthday to The Queen. This was followed by the appointment of returning officers and tellers', carried by a show of hands, and the adoption of standing orders, also carried by a show of hands.

Janice Langley then gave her address, noting that last year had been such a success with the Centenary celebrations and it was wonderful how much publicity could be generated worldwide from the cutting of a cake, she thank all who had contributed towards its success. The WI's roots are in education, not just a women's group but a group of women, learning new skills and making lasting friendships. We learned that the Board was supporting the member-led appeal to help Denman and a bucket collection would be held in the interval. Last year we had 60,375 new members, 76 new associations with a total of 226,402 members in total. A census form will be sent out in The WI Life, asking members views to make the WI what you want it to be.

The Hon. Treasurer gave her statement with a breakdown of income and expenditure, saying that we are in good heart. Although Denman is self-supporting there is a decline in funds, with maintenance costing £100,000 each year being one of the many concerns for its future with only 3% of the membership taking advantage of visits to Denman.

The resolution for appropriate care in hospitals for people with dementia moved by Norley WI, Cheshire Federation and seconded by Cheshire Federation was discussed. We heard from the Alzheimer's Society that 850,000 had dementia with 670,000 caring for them, which is a life changing with no future and needs to be brought out of the shadows. A NHS nurse, against the resolution, gave us an insight into the costs, how we can do more in other ways with social care not meeting people's needs, we need to look at the whole picture. Various members gave their views from the floor with many personal views and maybe the resolution was too narrow. The resolution was carried with 3,305 for and 856 against.

Guest speaker, Rona Fairhead, BBC Trust Chairman started by saying that both organizations had a lot in common, both clearly independent, campaigning passionately and voraciously for things that matter. She had memories of Saturday night's watching with the family and although changes are coming there are many ways to move forward, working with others in partnership, co-operating with brands, the I-player, a data-bank for news media, the micro-bit for children an ideas service in conjunction with the Tate, Opera and Universities for the benefit of the public. Springwatch had re-kindled a sense of wonder with 5.5million posting comments and we learned that spring had travelled up the country by 1.9 miles an hour and the artic tern had travelled 90,000 kllms. The BBC

is a trusted brand and a mark of quality, independence matters and answers to the nation not the state. Rona believes that the future of the BBC is to be Independent, Educate and Entertain and is a respected brand worldwide.

The morning session closed with the announcement of the 2015 prize winners, Joan Holman of Somerset Federation won the Lady Denman Cup with a story about 'What their WI would be like in 2115' and Patty Dawson of Cumbria Westmorland Federation won the Huxley Flower Arrangers cup for 'Our Heritage, Our Future'.

After lunch a constitutional resolution for Middlesex Federation to become a charitable incorporated organization was ratified and the Chair introduced the Board of Trustees.

The second resolution, avoid food waste, address poverty was moved by Snailbeach WI, Shropshire Federation and seconded by Shropshire Federation was presented. The arguments for supermarkets to help reduce waste had not gone far enough and although there had been great advances a lot more needed to be done. The argument against was that 70% was household waste and 30% retail and better packaging, labeling and sell by dates need to be addressed more fully. There are many voluntary agreements in place to help food poverty but education and over production are one of the many issues needed to be put in place as well. The issue was hotly debated from the floor with many agreeing that more needs to be done in this regard. The resolution was carried with 5,146 for and 1,080 against.

The guest speaker, Baroness D'Souza, Lord Speaker in the House of Lords gave an insight into the workings of the Lords and its purpose. There is a wealth of knowledge across all parties which help to shape the legislation. Bills leave the Lords in a different way in which they arrived, they can ask them to think again, amend them or reject them and in 2006 they sat continuously for 40 hours, but the Government of the day must have its way. At the moment the house is too large and needs to be reformed, there is no cap to their numbers, with the patronage of the Prime Minister and no special advisors being appointed it needs to be reduced by a third which would result in a significant saving in time and money. Asked by the Chair what she was most proud of it was her outreach programme to Universities and schools, regional visits to educate and inform about the House of Lords. It was easier to change laws via the Lords than the Commons. A vote of thanks for the insight and role the Members of the House had played in raising many issues on behalf of the WI was given by the Vice-Chair.

Janice Langley said there were challenges ahead and we must not be complacent, we had come far and achieved a great deal in the last 100 years but must move forward with challenges and changes to all levels. The WI is what you make of it, to inspire you and give you fun and friendship.

The day finished with all members joining together, waving Union Jack flags and singing Rule Britannia with a rousing chorus of Land of Hope and Glory. We then sang Jerusalem, Land of My Fathers and the National Anthem. We were wished a safe journey home, with next year's meeting taking place on 7th June 2017 at Liverpool.

Pat Palmer Withycombe Raleigh WI