

THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE MOVEMENT

The first Women's Institute was formed in Stoney Creek, Ontario, Canada in 1897. It was a branch of the Farmer's Institute which was supported by the Canadian Government. The first organizer of this rapidly growing movement was a lady called Laura Rose.

This movement started in Britain in 1915, under the auspices of the Agricultural Organisation Society, the aim being to encourage countrywomen to grow and preserve food to help to increase the food supply to a nation at war.

By 1916 there were 40 WI's and Lady Denman was appointed chairman and the National Federation of Women's Institutes was formed in Oct.1917. The subscription was then 2/-. By the end of W.W.1 there were 1,405 Institutes in Britain. The figure for 2011 has risen to 6,500 Institutes with 20,500 members in the U.K. and is the largest women's organization. It has its own College, magazine and annual national conference. Here resolutions concerning women's issues and parliamentary concerns are discussed and voted on; sometimes these are of national concern. Recommendations are then made to the relevant bodies.

TOFT WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Toft Women's Institute was formed in 1948. At that time there was no electricity in the village and water had only been piped in 1947. The population was approx. 450 persons and many local men were employed on the village farms.

The inaugural meeting was on 10th. June 1948 at 7.30pm. in the Church Institute. (The Peoples Hall was still being used for its original purpose – a village school.) The Church Institute is no longer standing. There were 21 women at this first meeting-6 of whom, came from Hardwick.

The first committee was composed of the following:-

President Mrs. Megan Radford

Mrs .I. Collett, Mrs Cowell , Mrs.Jacklin, Mrs Sparkes, Miss Wallis, Mrs. B. Ward, Mrs R Ward, and Mrs Wilson.

The charge for tea and a biscuit was to be 2d. It was agreed to hold a “mammoth whist drive”, to raise funds and handicraft classes of glove-making and also rug making were to be organised. Meetings were to be held on the first Thursday of the month at 7.30pm in the Institute and committee meetings on last Thursday of the month. This set the pattern for some time to come.

In March 1949, members decided that the purchase of a primus stove, some Tilley lamps and a large kettle were necessary in order to make tea and to increase the amount of light when it was dark evenings.

March 1951

At this time a request was received from the W.R.V.S. to collect old magazines, which would be sent on to our troops in Korea.

By March 1952 the committee had changed. The members were :- Mrs Barton, Miss Bullen, Mrs Cowell, Mrs Read, Mrs Rogers, Mrs Sparks, Mrs Tebbitt, Mrs Whitehouse and Mrs I.Ward. The village had set up a Coronation Committee and Mrs. Whitehouse had represented the WI. It was asked that the WI. should have a stall at the Coronation Fayre selling homemade goods and craft items.

The following year 1953 the W.I. organised a house to house collection for the East Coast Flood Disaster and £13 3s 7d was raised. A dozen pillows were made by members from an old feather mattress and sent off to the Flood Relief Disaster .

The February meeting in 1958 saw a Valentine Whist Drive, with £4 17s 4d being raised for funds. The new committee comprised:-

President Miss Bullen, Vice: Mrs Cawte

Secretary Mrs D Ward Treasurer Mrs R Collett

In 1961, under the presidency of Mrs L. Hills, the WI approached the Parish Council concerning the possibility of a playground for young children .They also agreed to help with either a children's' or a senior citizens' party to be held for the village.

1977 was the year of the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

To celebrate this, the W.I. planted a Maple tree on the small green adjacent to the Glebe meadow. This was carried out by Mrs Nancy Sparkes, 82 who was the oldest member and she was given honorary membership in recognition of her W.I. service.



Planting the Silver Jubilee tree, Toft Village Green, 1977

Jubilee day saw the W.I. float leading the village parade, members being dressed in costume, the title of the float being "Costume through the ages", first prize being awarded for this entry.



W.I. Silver Jubilee Float

Village litter bins had been decorated with the royal colours by other members. The village parade finished in Mr C. Tebbit's meadow, where games and competitions had been organized. There then followed a picnic lunch after which there were children's sports run by Mr. D. Robinson. The day ended with a dance in Mr C. Tebbit's barn.

In July many homemade cakes were baked to sell at the Cambridge Tudor Fayre on Parkers Piece, which raised the sum of £40.

In September a jumble sale in the Church Institute raised £16. It was at this point that it was decided to keep a W.I. Scrapbook.(on display)

In 1978, members again cooked for the Tudor Fayre on Parkers Piece and dressed in costume.

In 1979 the title of the Parkers Piece event was changed to Victorian Fayre. David Roberts and Simon Quick dressed in Victorian attire, and sold Gingerbread Men near the Toft Stall.

A jumble sale was held by members in Mawson Hall which raised £63.09p for the Cancer Scanner Appeal in 1980 and Sally Roberts was awarded 2nd prize for an entry into the Interfederation Craft Cup at the County Show.

The Toft May Day parade in 1984 featured a W.I. float with 4 members dressed as clowns and 1 as a harlequin. In the evening there was a Ceilidh for which W.I. members provided food. On the craft side some members made samplers for the East of England Show class entitlement being "History and Development of a Craft". Toft won second prize.

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's Toft W.I. won several prizes for their village in various craft competitions.

The W.I. continued to play an active part in Toft village life, helping at Sports days and having cake stalls on the village green as well as monthly entries in various craft and cookery competitions. We had some very talented women at the meetings also interesting speakers. The young women of the village did not seem to want to become involved with the W.I. and membership decreased. In 1998 Toft W.I. celebrated its Golden Jubilee and an anniversary barbeque was held, and a special cake baked for the occasion.

By late 2002 membership had reduced to nine and in January 2003 it was decided to disband Toft W.I., a sad day for the remaining members.

