**Wanstead Women’s Institute Annual Report**

**June 2014-May 2015**

**Membership**

Since May 2014 our membership has increased from 66 members last year to an all-time high of 74.

**Members’ meetings**

There are twelve members’ meetings each year with an average attendance of 50 overall. This includes both members and visitors, many of whom then join Wanstead WI.

We have eight speaker or activity evenings, three socials and one business meeting. Over the past twelve months we have met a cheese maker who brought samples of his produce which we were able to buy and a beekeeper who told us all about beekeeping history, bees and how to look after them. He also brought some honey with him. There were fascinating talks on Eton Manor Boys and Girls Clubs, the history of Epping Forest, and the life of a stuntwoman, who had appeared in James Bond and Harry Potter films. We were entertained by a storyteller with tales of myth, legend and imagination and met a stylist with advice on looking good. Finally we were taught basic Greek dancing from different regions of Greece, by one of our members and her husband, both wearing traditional costume they had made themselves. The three socials were a chance for members to chat and catch up, with home-made food and drinks to share. Sometimes there is an activity as well, at the April social the members who came made bunting pendants for WI centenary decorations. There is a monthly competition so members have a chance to display their practical skills or something that is relevant to the theme.

**Events and activities**

As well as the monthly members’ evenings, there were a number of organised outings. Theatre trips, visits to National Trust houses and other historic sites and interesting walks around London and Epping Forest. The most moving event of 2014 was planting ceramic poppies at the Tower of London event “Blood swept Lands and Seas of Red” commemorating WW1 by a group of twelve members organised by Maggie Widdecombe. This was written up for our newsletter and subsequently appeared in Essex News published by Essex Federation. A fortnightly craft afternoon was set up in member’s house early this year and the Book Club celebrated its second anniversary in January. The monthly coffee morning and the Cuckfield pub evening continue to provide time for members to get together and chat.

We are very grateful to all who have taken the time and effort to organise these treats. If anyone has any ideas for future outings and events, your suggestions and organisational skills would be much appreciated.

**Involvement with local communities:**

* **Charity of the Year:** In 2014 we supported Leytonstone Children’s Centre, and supplied their food bank with 90 bags of groceries with an estimated value of at least £900. Members continue to support this activity and the children’s playtime by donating art materials. In addition, Frances Simmons and Maggie Widdecombe organised a “store cupboard lunch” making several tasty meat and vegetarian dishes from items on the donation list. Members produced designs for ceramic mugs which were then sold in aid of the charity. In 2015 we have selected Wanstead Playground Association as our charity and are planning events to support that.
* **Wanstead Festival:** in September 2014 we took a stall at Wanstead Festival to raise awareness of the WI and its activities. Volunteers manning the stall met the Mayor and Mayoress of Redbridge as they toured the festival.

**WI Official Activities:**

* NFWI Centenary celebrations: Vice-President Carol Massey and Secretary Christine Toogood represented Wanstead WI in November at the baton relay event at Southend Pier. We are currently planning some events for Wanstead WI.
* Hazel Welch attended a President’s training day in June and a Resolution briefing session in May at Essex Federation’s HQ
* Frances Cowper-Holhausen is participating in NFWI/Kingston Project to help students from Kingston University get involved with craft projects.
* Ruth Kaufmann is now an external advisor on the NFWI Finance Committee.

**Committee Activities:**

* Changes: Hazel Welch became President in May 2014 and Christine Toogood took over the role of Secretary. Maggie Widdecombe: Treasurer, Carol Massey: Vice-President and Jennifer Palmer: Membership Secretary stayed in their roles. Kate Frisby became newsletter and notice board editor and Gladys Shuckard-Rowe took on the refreshment rota and managing the survey of members.
* The Committee held twelve monthly meetings where information from NFWI and Essex Federation was circulated and then passed on to the members and planning for meetings and activities for the future took place.
* The committee initiated a “post-it note” survey of members to get feedback on the activities and meetings offered by Wanstead WI. The updated results are available on the notice board- the majority of comments from members have been actioned.
* A Connections Book has been compiled of members’ interests and skills to encourage more networking and contacts between them. The book is available by the notice boards for updating and consultation.
* An internal Facebook page has been set up for members to post photos and share information.
* The production of the monthly newsletter resumed in July 2014 containing information and news about the activities offered to members.

**Conclusion**

This report from the Committee has recorded edited highlights of a very busy year. More detailed information can be obtained from the Newsletter archive on our website. It reflects the enthusiasm and hard work of many members for which we say “Thank you very much”.