

**Welcome to Women Together
Summer 2023
Scottish Women's Institutes members' magazine**

This is a print-friendly version of the Scottish Women's Institutes members' magazine.

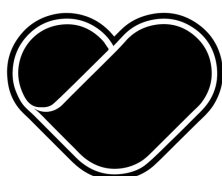
**On the cover:
AGM Special - Going for gold!
Meet our new Board trustees and President**

Scottish Women's Institutes was established in 1917 and is an inclusive and inspirational membership-based organisation. We are here to build an inclusive community, to have fun and form friendships, to campaign, to learn, to share and to socialise. We provide a platform for social activities and networking, and champion women's issues.

Find out more about us at [**www.theswi.org.uk**](http://www.theswi.org.uk)

Scottish Women's Institutes is a registered Scottish Charity No. SC011901

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The SWI invites you to – Straw Craft for Beginners

Two-day course, lunch & materials from £99

Saturday 15th July 10am–4pm & Saturday 19th August 10am–4pm

Dundee Contemporary Arts, 152 Nethergate, Dundee DD1 4EA

The SWI presents this course for beginners and experienced crafters, led by straw work expert Elaine Lindsay. Elaine mixes traditional and contemporary styles and has designed for catwalk shows in New York, Paris, and London, and for theatre and TV.

Part 1 | 15th July, 10am–4pm Participants make 2–3 items at beginner level, and progress on to more complex techniques to practice before Part 2.

Part 2 | 19th August 10am–4pm Participants will create more complicated designs and build confidence in key techniques.

The SWI is Scotland's leading membership organisation for women and is committed to ensuring skills are passed on.

Book your tickets: rb.gy/3b9df

Leading Ladies

As Anne Kerr steps down as National President, Mary takes the reins...

Being the National President of the SWI for the past three years has been a challenge, but one Anne Kerr took on with relish.

As the global pandemic threw the world into chaos, the SWI – like every other UK charity – found itself in a difficult position as everything stopped and everyone worried.

It was doubly difficult for a membership organisation focused on offering women opportunities to socialise, share experiences, and learn from each other... many Institutes closed and the SWI's future seemed uncertain.

Good job we had a steady hand on the tiller. As Chair of the Board of Trustees, Anne was instrumental in forging a new path for the SWI to ensure its future is as secure as the foundations it was built on by its founder, Catherine Blair, in 1917.

As an Ayrshire dairy farmer, Anne knows a fair few things about facing challenges and change. In her term of office Anne has overseen the appointment of a new CEO, Diane Cooper, the Board's new strategy for the SWI, and the sale of the central office in Edinburgh. It's been a busy time!

Sadly, Covid-19 made it impossible for Anne to fully embrace her role as President in the first couple of years of her term in office. Visiting Institutes and Federations was off the cards and even when things restarted everyone was masked up and reticent to meet in numbers. However, in the past year, Anne has made up for this in spades, enjoying trips across the country to meet members old and new.

Anne also represented the SWI on the world stage, welcoming visitors from across the world to the ACWW European Conference in Glasgow in 2022 which was hosted by the SWI, and during a recent visit to the ACWW World Conference in Malaysia with a contingent of members (see page 28).

The Board and the team at SWI central office would like to thank Anne for all of her hard work on behalf of the organisation and its members. No small feat given that it is all done on a voluntary basis.

Now as Anne hands the role of SWI's National President to Stewartry Federation's Mary Burney, she can have a well-earned rest. However, not for long as she will still be a steadying force as part of the Board of Trustees. Anne and Mary are joined on the Board by existing members Joan Hutchison, Karen Johnson and Linda Riddell, and new Trustees Jane Hogg, Sybil Stuart, Susie Finlayson, Linda McTurk and May Tosh.

Thank you for everything, Anne, it's great to know our future is in safe hands.

Watch Anne's handover to Mary: rb.gy/b4oc2

Meet the SWI's new Board trustees

Jane Hogg

Mouswald SWI, Dumfriesshire Federation

Jane has been a member of Mouswald Rural since she was 16. She is past President of Lower Nithsdale Group, has served on the Dumfriesshire Federation executive for the past 15 years – three years of them as Housewives Convener – and has been Joint Show Secretary for the past four shows.

In the 2007 triennium she represented Dumfriesshire at Central Council on the Education Committee, and in this past triennium has been on the H&H committee.

She has presented more than 150 cookery demonstrations for local Institutes and groups, and on a national scale too, broadening her knowledge of Scottish geography having visited places as far apart as Wigtownshire and Wick.

While Jane's passion is clearly cooking, her other hobby is curling.

May Tosh

Oban SWI, Argyll Federation

May has been involved with the SWI for around ten years and is currently Treasurer of Argyll Federation. For the past three years she has served as Vice-Convenor on the Finance Committee.

May's professional career began in hospitality, as she gained qualifications at an early age in hotel management and bookkeeping and then moved to work in local government.

Following a career break to bring up her family May joined a housing association as Finance Officer and was instrumental in developing systems to assist with the management of a large housing development programme. She was then promoted to the post of Corporate Services Manager.

May is now retired and enjoys travelling with her husband. Her other passions are crafting, baking, and genealogy.

Sybil Stuart

Fochabers and District SWI, Moray and Nairn Federation

Sybil has lived in Fochabers for 46 years and has been an SWI member for almost 40 years.

During that time she has been Secretary and Treasurer and is currently President of Fochabers and District Institute.

She has been involved with Moray and Nairn Federation for the past fifteen years, beginning as Social Secretary, and served as Federation President for nine years.

At National level, Sybil served on the H&H Committee and was a Central Councillor and is currently on the National Conference Committee helping to shape the event.

A keen crafter, Sybil has taken part in several proficiency tests, Federation Shows and local shows, sometimes acting as a judge, and has done demonstrations in various subjects over the years.

Susie Finlayson

Wilton Dean SWI, Roxburghshire Federation

Susie is currently President of Roxburghshire Federation. During her time as a member, she has enjoyed taking part in many local and national activities including the Anstruther Gray and choirs competitions, and conferences.

She was one of the Evelyn Baxter scholars in 2019 and “absolutely loved” travelling the country meeting fellow members and making new friends.

Susie lives in Hawick with her husband (when he’s not away working!) and her springer spaniel, Bailey, and works at the Great Tapestry of Scotland Visitor Centre in Galashiels. She also teaches embroidery workshops across the country.

Susie is looking forward to being part of the Board, saying: “at such an exciting time for the SWI, I see this as an opportunity to give something back to an organisation that has given me so much.”

Linda McTurk

Lochrutton SWI, Stewartry Federation

Linda was born and brought up on the family farm in Dumfries and went to Glasgow’s Queens College to study Home Economics before completing a year’s teaching course at Jordanhill College.

She joined Lochrutton SWI to get to know people in the area when she married and relocated there and has now been a member of Lochrutton for more than 45 years. She continued to be a member even when she moved back to the farm she was brought up on with her husband and their daughters.

Linda has served as President and Secretary for Lochrutton and “was also given the privilege” of serving as President of Stewartry Federation. She is a judge and national demonstrator for the SWI and thoroughly enjoys meeting people from all over the country.

She is looking forward to her time on the Board and very much appreciates the fact that she has been given this opportunity.

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Thanks to the outgoing Board trustees

We are grateful to the members who gave their time and expertise in their roles as Trustees on the very first Board of Trustees in the SWI's history.

Thanks to Dawn Endean, Aileen Cavers, Katie Wood, Anne Howat and Kirsty Forsyth for ensuring the organisation weathered the Covid-19 storm!

New goodies hit the shop

Special summer offer for members

A new range of needlefelting kits and fabulous aprons are now available in the SWI online shop. To launch these all members can get 10 per cent off all purchases by using the **code 'SUMMER10'**.

With needlefelting on the rise, the new range of kits are perfect gifts for beginners – or to try yourself! The SWI has teamed up with Steffi Stern and her fabulous Makerss company to bring members the hottest designs – we have hares, butterflies, dogs, owls and even a special Aardman robin to choose from! Prices start at just £17.50 and you'll get a further 10 per cent off with the members' code!

We have new aprons in stock, too. Members requested white aprons – great for bakers as they don't show up flour and icing sugar – and these now complement our traditional blue style. These will be £13.49 with your 10 per cent discount code.

Happy shopping!

Half a century of fun for Audrey

Congratulations to Audrey Hunter, of Muckhart SWI, who has been rewarded for her 50 years as an SWI member). At the March meeting, Muckhart President Greer Conroy presented Audrey with a loyal service badge, a beautiful porcelain SWI mug and a certificate.

She has also been made a lifetime Honorary Member of Muckhart Institute as she joined Muckhart Institute in 1972, was Press Secretary for many years, and served as the President from 1989 to 1990.

Remembering

JEN GALLACHER

Cumbernauld SWI (Rural) was very saddened to learn of the death of Mrs Jen Gallacher who was one of their longest serving members Jen joined the SWI in 1971 and during the past 52 years held the position of President, Secretary, Treasurer, H&H representative and Committee member several times. Jen also entered competitions, winning many prizes along the way.

When Cumbernauld Institute was forced to move to new premises in Kildrum in the seventies, Jen proved a pillar of strength, holding things together.

Jen attended meetings until recently when ill health precluded her from doing so. She was a quiet but well-known and respected member of the Rural of which she was very knowledgeable. Indeed, if she had been asked, it's almost certain Jen could have recited the Constitution backwards.

Jen's friendship and caring will be remembered (and missed) by her many friends from the old Central Group and at Cumbernauld Rural.

JEAN FORGAN

Jean Forgan, who sadly passed away in January, was a hard-working loyal member of Kilconquhar & Colinsburgh institute.

She worked her way through offices from competition secretary to President, and entered most of the monthly competitions and Federation shows.

At the centenary in 2019, Jean received recognition for being a continuous member of the institute for 43 years.

Not in the best of health, she was determined to attend the study tour to the Cotswolds last year.

Jean will be greatly missed by all her rural friends and the local community.

To submit an obituary email hello@theswi.org.uk

Sneaky peeks

The SWI office in Edinburgh has been a hive of activity so far this summer with members bringing their skills to the fore.

A range of how-to videos has been filmed, featuring papercrafting, quilting, crochet and more. Members from across Scotland took time out of their busy lives to provide a great insight into starting a new craft from scratch and these films will undoubtedly help to inspire a new generation of crafters.

A great two-day shoot with Dee Faulds of Heart Films is now in post-production and the resulting short tutorials will be Sneaky peeks launched this September at Women In Scotland – SWI National Conference & Exhibition 2023 in Perth.

The new Evelyn Baxter Scholars for 2024 also brought their skills in spade-fuls when they arrived for training in teaching Basic Dressmaking, led by tailoring expert Gill McBride.

The Scholars, Jessie Mickle and Lesley Robinson, will tour the country from January 2024 to offer beginners tips in making their patterns work for their body shape.

Here's to a fabulous year of learning!

Walk this way

SWI members came out in force to support dog lover and WI member Karin Snape from Warrington.

Karin – complete with dog costume – had taken on the task of walking the country in aid of Guide Dogs. She has raised 26 puppies and wanted to give something back to the charity which means so much to her family Karin is now safely home but you can still support her fundraising here: [justgiving.com/fundraising/karin-snape](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/karin-snape)

Have you booked yet?

All women in Scotland are invited to join in the fun at the SWI's new-look National Conference and Exhibition this September for an inspiring dive into the things the SWI holds dear: its heritage, lifelong learning, enduring friendships and sharing skills.

Can anyone go?

Yes! All members and non-members can join in the fun and be inspired by the great speakers. This event will be a great chance to meet up with others from across the country and the focus is on fun, friendship and learning.

Will it all be member-focussed?

Yes! This year's new-look National Conference will be a great mixture of a focus on members, learning and protecting our heritage. It will also be a great opportunity to catch up with friends old and new and celebrate everything the SWI offers.

What does my ticket include?

One-day and two-day passes include refreshments, lunches and an evening drinks reception on the Friday for all day delegates, free entry to the Friday Evening Market with pop-up clothes shop and have your say activities.

What is the Friday Evening Market?

Visitors will be treated to chef demonstrations, Make & Take sessions with experienced crafters and kids' craft sessions led by local SWI Young Dippers. The evening event is open to the public and will be a fantastic showcase of everything the SWI offers and will be a fantastic showcase for the SWI.

Can I buy raffle tickets?

Yes! There are amazing prizes to be won, including a stay for two at a fabulous hotel and spa and bespoke garden tours. To be in with a chance to win these prizes you can purchase a book of 5 tickets for £5 or individual tickets for £1. Tickets have been distributed to all Federations and anyone can buy them – including friends and family, so get in touch with your Federation to get yours.

Lunches and refreshments are included in your ticket – one-day passes from £30 and a two-day pass is just £70.

You can get your tickets here: rb.gy/dh2se

DAY ONE | Friday 15th September | Daytime

- **09.00 – 09.45** Pre-event Breakfast Session for Federation Presidents
- **10.00 – 11.00** Registration, refreshments and exhibition viewing
- **11.00 – 11.10** Conference welcome
 - By SWI President Mary Burney
- **11.10 – 11.50** Global inspirational speaker
 - Mike Stevenson on friendship
- **11.50 – 12.30** SWI strategy update
 - Featuring a panel of SWI's Board of Trustees and CEO with a Q&A session
- **12.30 – 14.00** Lunch and exhibition viewing
- **14.00 – 14.45** Heritage crafts
 - Guest speakers Mary Lewis of Heritage Crafts and Elaine Lindsay of Something Corny discuss the importance of maintaining and sharing skills.
Followed by a Q&A session
- **14.45 – 15.15** Refreshments and exhibition viewing
- **15.15 – 16.00** Lifelong learning
 - Guest speakers Mark O'Donnell of Age Scotland and Dr Isabella Moore CBE of The Olderpreneur Alliance discuss learning, life and opportunities.
Followed by a Q&A session
- **16.00 – 16.15** Closing remarks
- **18.00 – 19.00** Drinks reception and evening buffet for all delegates

DAY ONE | FRIDAY 15TH SEPTEMBER | FAMILY EVENING MARKETPLACE

Doors open to public

- **19.00 – 21.00** Family Evening Marketplace
 - Chef and craft demos
 - Kids' Make & Take Junior Dippers workshops
 - Members' craft exhibition
 - Health & wellness activities
 - Preloved clothing pop-up shop
 - Information stands
 - Prize raffles and lots of fun!

Please note the programme may vary on the day.

DAY TWO | Saturday 16th September | Daytime

- **08.00 – 08.45** Pre-event Breakfast Session for Federation Secretaries and Treasurers
- **09.00 – 09.30** Registration, refreshments and exhibition viewing
- **09.30 – 09.45** Welcome address
 - by SWI President Mary Burney

- **09.45 – 11.00** Guest speakers
 - Jen Hogg and Helen Vass on pursuing passions, *followed by Q&A*
- **12.00 – 13.00** Lunch and exhibition viewing
- **13.30 – 14.30** Guest speaker
 - Coinneach Macleod, *followed by Q&A*
- **14.30 – 15.00** Competition prizegiving ceremony
- **15.00 – 15.30** Closing remarks

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Coinneach Macleod

SATURDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER | 13.30 | MAIN AUDITORIUM

As a TV star and TikTok sensation Coinneach Macleod – the Hebridean Baker – can have 20 million people watching him bake from his home on Lewis. That's quite a number when you live in a village of just 30!

Coinneach moved back to his childhood home of Lewis after an exciting worldwide journey – at just 19 he packed his bags and moved to Russia, learned the language and ended up becoming a journalist.

"I don't know if it's the Viking in me but I just wanted something that was so different culturally to what I had experienced." A spell in Australia followed before he returned to the UK.

Back on Lewis during lockdown, Coinneach took his love of stories and cooking to TikTok, saying, "I thought people on the island might watch videos of me sharing recipes and I didn't want them to forget the stories of people like my aunt Bellag."

Of course, not just Lewis but the world was hooked and now, with two best-selling books, *The Hebridean Baker* and *The Hebridean Baker: My Scottish Island Cookbook*, behind him Coinneach is a regular on ITV's *This Morning*. He's also been travelling again – this time on an American and Canadian book tour with hundreds coming to his book signings in every city.

Now Coinneach is heading to share his experiences of superstardom with his friends at the SWI. If you joined us for our recent online session you'll know he has a great sense of fun – catch up with that here: rb.gy/gd3h3

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Jen Hogg

SEPTEMBER 16TH | 9.45AM | MAIN AUDITORIUM

Jen will join prizewinning chef Helen Vass to talk about making the most of her passion, and inspire us to follow our dreams.

Jen's passion is sewing and she has stitched her life around the craft!

She applied to The Great British Sewing Bee in 2019 "without any expectation of being picked" but went on to the semi finals and was described by the team as "one of the most talented and consistent sewers ever to take part".

Now, Jen makes every day – sewing, knitting, crocheting... and inventing under her Jenerates label. These inventions including the Sewing Ruler and Seam Circles which have featured in major magazines, and been praised by makers.

While Jen can't remember being taught to sew, she does it for the joy of making unique and well-fitted clothes in beautiful fabric. The reduced environmental impact of sewing her own clothes is important for her, and that follows through to her inventions, too.

"The sewing tools are made from wood," she says, "and I'm dedicated to working with local companies wherever possible."

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Helen Vass

SEPTEMBER 16TH | 9.45AM | MAIN AUDITORIUM

As a 10-year-old Helen got into baking with her mum but who could have predicted just where it would take her?

Now known as a "pastry magician", Helen was part of a trio who won BBC's very first series of Bake Off Creme de la Creme, beating 15 other teams from the likes of London's Hilton on Park Lane and Marks & Spencer. And the awards didn't stop there – she won the prestigious Les Dames d'Escoffier legacy award and has been named Patisserie Chef of the Year.

Helen now teaches at South Lanarkshire College inspiring new generations of patisserie chefs and will join us to talk about bringing passions to life.

It's showtime!

SWI MEMBERS HOST CREATIVE CRAFTS AT THIS YEAR'S ROYAL HIGHLAND SHOW

The SWI will be hosting the Handcrafts Pavilion at this year's Royal Highland Show, with members showcasing their skills for thousands of visitor during the popular event at Ingliston Showground.

The Handcrafts Marquee is run by the SWI's RHS committee, and members volunteer to share their skills as demonstrator. A large team of members also act as stewards to ensure everything goes to plan at the event. The team put a lot of time and effort into setting up, running and managing the marquee and many members also compete in the many competition classes.

Last year's Overall Winner was Lou Washington of Coldstream SWI with a fabulous needlefelted woodland scene. See her tips for entering the show here: rb.gy/ax5ri

This year, members of the public will have the opportunity to come along to see crafts on the theme 'Rainbows', great crafters at work and have a hands-on experience, too. Participants will either have a go at the craft or make items to take home, and SWI members will be leading the way.

Join us for what will be a great weekend of crafts, fun and a chance to meet fellow members!

Thursday 22nd June - 11am and 2pm

- Sashiko demonstration and Make & Take,
 - Led by Lorraine McCafferty, Balerno SWI.

Friday 23rd June - 11am and 2pm

- Amigurumi crochet demonstration and Make & Take
 - Led by Katy Gaffney, Minishant SWI.

Saturday 24th June - 11am and 2pm

- Felted flowers Make & Take
 - Led by Tracy Spencer, Bathgate Belles SWI.

Sunday 25th June - 11am and 1pm

- Crochet jewellery demonstration and have a go session
 - Led by Margaret Robb, Slamannan SWI.

Get your tickets for the Royal Highland Show here: rb.gy/vkfe9

Unmissable events

JUNE 26TH - Chef Julie Lin's 'Cooking on a Budget'

CELEBRITY SHOWCASE | ONLINE | 7PM | Free for members, £10 for non members

We are delighted to present a rising star of Scotland's foodie scene, Julie Lin, owner of Glasgow's restaurant, GaGa. Julie will show us how to make budget friendly, mouthwatering Thai-inspired fishcakes with a charred apricot sriracha dip, a recipe featured in her book Julie's Can-teen, along with a delicious apricot dessert. All ingredients used to make the dishes are from canned food!

Book your tickets here: rb.gy/stp3u

JULY 5TH - Chocolate making masterclass: salted caramel & tempering

SKILL SHARE | ONLINE | 7PM | Free for members, £10 for non members

Join us for a fantastic tutorial by Finlay Macdonald, owner of Chocolates of Glenshiel. Finlay will demonstrate how he makes his delicious salted caramel chocolates and will move on to tempering chocolate. This will offer you tips for heating and cooling chocolate to stabilise it for making the perfect impression. A full ingredients list is available at the booking link.

Book your tickets here: rb.gy/32eqz

JULY 6TH – How to sizzle at public speaking

SKILL SHARE SESSION | ONLINE | 7PM | Free for members, £10 for non members

Whether you have a speech to make, a presentation to do, or even want to voice your opinion in a meeting, Toastmasters member Sheila Fraser can help you prepare.

Book your tickets here: rb.gy/4tumc

AUGUST 7TH – National outdoor bowling

COMPETITION | INPERSON | Moray Bowling Club, Elgin

Moray and Nairn Federation is hosting this year's event and Federations are invited to book their teams in for a chance to win the coveted award. The entry fee is £40 for each team – contact your Federation Secretary for more information.

Book your team entry here: rb.gy/1kvn6

JULY 15TH & AUGUST 19 – Straw craft course for beginners

IN-PERSON | 10AM-4PM | DCA, 152 NETHERGATE, DUNDEE DD1 4EA

£99 for members, £115 for non members

Beginners and experienced crafters are invited to come along to this two-part course in straw work. This will be full of learning, fun and friendship, and be led by Elaine Lindsay of Something Corny. Straw work is one of Britain's traditional crafts and it has been practiced for hundreds of years and you will be helping to preserve it for future generations.

In most cases straw work is crafted from wheat straw to create decorative or functional items, and on this course you will practice a new skill that will allow you to continue making straw crafts in the future – perhaps even sharing the craft with others through your teachings!

Elaine's work is a mixture of traditional and contemporary styles, and she has designed for catwalk shows in New York, Paris, and London. She has also produced pieces for television and theatre and regularly gives talks, demonstrations, and classes on her straw work so she is wellversed in sharing her skills.

Book your tickets here: rb.gy/3b9df

OCTOBER 26TH-29TH – Creative Crafts Christmas

PUBLIC EVENT | SECC, Glasgow

The SWI will be joining the hoardes of crafters and exhibitors at the Christmas Creative Crafts Show. If you haven't been it's well worth popping down to fill your boots and empty your pockets!

Building on the success of spring's show the SWI will be offering Make & Take sessions – more details will follow in the monthly members' newsletters. Would you like to be a helper on the SWI stand?

Members who would like to assist visitors who come to make and take at the stand will receive a free pass to the Creative Crafts Show 2023. To register your interest email hello@theswi.org.uk with 'Creative Crafts' in the subject line.

AUGUST 9TH Menopause: To HRT or not HRT?

HEALTH & WELLBEING | ONLINE | 7PM | Free for members, £5 for non members

We are delighted to present menopause expert Dr Heather Currie who will provide a complete overview of the menopause. Here she explains why she is uniquely suited to offering advice...

"As a gynaecologist I became interested in menopause in the early 1990s, as I was studying for the membership exam for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Back then, there was quite a bit of confusion about HRT and was becoming apparent that it would be helpful to have specialist hospital-based services that primary care teams could refer women to.

30 years ago, I started the first menopause hospital-based clinic in Dumfries and Galloway. The very first clinic had two patients but from the second week there has been a waiting list and it continues to be busy.

Often in life, you're more inspired by the negative things that happened than the positive things. When I told my colleagues back in 1999 that I wanted to develop a service, one was fantastic and said, 'That's a brilliant thing to do. We need that in this area. That'd be great for you to specialise in that.' Another said, 'Well, it's very honourable but you'll probably find most of these women have nothing wrong with them'. That made me more determined to do it!

I also got involved with menopause education for women and healthcare professionals. Initially, I produced simple leaflets, mainly focused on HRT because in the 1990s there was a lot of interest in HRT and there was a lot of research going on. It was seen as having more benefits than risks and lots of women were happy to take it and lots of primary care teams were confident in prescribing it.

However, there was a lot changing, so while the leaflet was really helpful, it was often out of date, so we created a website with all of the information the leaflet held as we could always update it. The focus of it is to provide accurate information for women so they can make informed choices so they can know what to look out for, to be prepared, and to make informed choices about managing their menopause. The website now receives about 7,000-8,000 visitors a day.

The magazine Menopause Matters was published in 2005. I wanted to glamorise menopause because it was still seen quite negatively – all doom and gloom. I thought having personal stories in a magazine you could have a cup of tea with while flicking the pages and looking at nice pictures would add glamour. The magazine has gone from strength to strength and we now print 10,000 copies."

Book your tickets here: rb.gy/aqpsw

Menopause Matters is available here: www.menopausematters.co.uk/

A Heilan' hoolie...

Rural fund helps kick-start three great new groups

Three new groups are bringing women in the remote rural areas in the Highlands.

Funding from Inspiring Scotland's Ideas Into Action fund is providing opportunities for groups to get off the ground serving women in and around the villages of Ullapool, Achiltibuie and Dundonnell. This follows similar funding of three new groups in Perth & Kinross – Kinross, Scone and Perth itself.

The funding enables the groups to cover their venue and speaker costs for the first three months to give them the best start possible.

The activities the women choose is up to them but there is certainly fun on the menu if the list of ideas in the Highlands is anything to go by. Walking groups, line dancing, cookery demonstrations and paddle boarding all proved popular and the groups are also keen to meet each other.

One idea in Achiltibuie, to form a Whatsapp group for mini disasters, was ingenious. If a member had a sudden problem such as a minor flood or even a wonky cupboard door, the mini disaster team could rally around. That really is women supporting women!

The three new groups join Musselburgh and Largs as the newest additions to the SWI family and we wish them all the best! Starting a new group can be rewarding.

Friendship is still the bedrock of the SWI

Jessica Munro helped to breathe life into Kinross

"Lots of new houses have been built in the Kinross area, which of course means that we have many new families moving into the area. So, when I was asked if I would help to start a new SWI group in Kinross, I had absolutely no hesitation in saying yes as it took me back to the time in my own life when I moved into the area.

I had no links with Kinross, I did not come from a farming background, and had never lived in the country. I was desperately looking for things to get involved in, and ways of meeting new friends. Then a woman I met suggested I went along with her to the 'Rural' and, as they say, the rest is history.

That, however, was more than twenty years ago, and many things have changed in that time. Now women are very busy, and the world we live in means the demands on their time is very different. If we want our organisation to survive and grow (and of course we do) then we must make it worth while for today's women to invest their time.

That means we must support them to do the things they want to do, when they want to do it, and how they want to do it. The approach and language used must also be much more informal, and terms like 'Institutes' and 'Committees' should be avoided.

The women I talked to said that was old fashioned and reinforced the view that the SWI was boring, was for older women, and had nothing to offer women of today.

What these women want is a relaxed, stress-free and enjoyable 'get together', not to be going to a formal business-like meeting. They are looking for 'me time'.

So, how do we reach out to women we don't know yet, and how do we find out what their interests are? We ask them.

When I agreed to help start the new Kinross Group, the first thing I did was to post the idea on the Kinross-shire Community Group Facebook page, and within a day I had more than thirty positive responses.

Social media is the way most people communicate these days, so was the best way to start getting the information out there. To make sure I reached as many women as I could, I also made contact with local mother and baby groups, and put notices in the community centre.

The team at SWI central office then set up a Kinross Women's Group Facebook group and that made it possible for me to communicate directly with the women who had expressed interest. I was able to post the dates, times, venues and info for the first four events once they were organised.

I cannot overstate the importance of communication, and for the new group it is absolutely crucial. We must keep them engaged, and to do that we must keep the information and chats going, otherwise they will lose interest and we lose them.

The launch event at Kinross' Green Hotel in February was a major success. I had booked the venue for 60 but 74 women attended so we had to set up extra tables!

I'm really pleased to say that we now have 94 members in our Facebook group. While I don't expect all of them to turn up for every event, we have a direct line to them and will nurture the friendships.

There have been suggestions for activities which offer mental health benefits. Book groups, yoga and running groups, classes in art dance, yoga and drama, and various crafts are in the mix, so there will be something to appeal to the majority in the months ahead.

When I asked the question 'what do you hope to get from joining the group?', more than ninety per cent said 'friendship'. We may all want to develop and interact with friends in different ways, and at different times, but friendship still seems to be the bedrock of being part of the SWI. With help and encouragement from our existing Institutes and support from central office, I'm confident the new group will go from strength to strength. We have a treasurer, a secretary and two more members in supporting roles, and they are calling themselves The Organising Team. As Debbie, the new secretary, said: "It should be a melting pot of ages and cultures".

Our history goes back well over 100 years, when women worked the land and their role became increasingly important. History tells us the Board of Agriculture was recommended to support the establishment of women's institutes in Scotland to help with food production and conservation, and 'If you know a good thing, pass it on' was adopted as the S.W.R.I. slogan.

Now, in this constantly changing world, I liken the changes to the SWI to that of buying an old building. We put in new windows to let the light in, we re-decorate, re-furnish, and install central heating to make it warm and welcoming, and we do all of that sound in the knowledge that we are building on firm foundations."

If you have been inspired to set up a new group in your area email Ashmita, SWI's Membership Development Officer, at hello@theswi.org.uk.

Members bring sparkle to the AGM

Led by outgoing National President Anne Kerr, this year's online event was a chance to celebrate meeting strategic aims and to showcase members' achievements...

During 2022, the Board and committees met virtually and in hybrid meetings to continually review the programme of events. After conducting the new SWI triennium election process, we have some changes to announce to our Board and committees.

Members were invited to apply for committees roles but unfortunately we didn't receive enough applications to maintain the current committee structure of a Finance committee, Communications committee, Handcrafts & Homeskills committee and an Education & International committee. Therefore, the Board has approved a slimmed down structure of a Finance Committee and a new Skills Committee which will take forward all of the Handcrafts & Homeskills and Education & International activities.

With digital communications we no longer require a Communications committee as this is managed by staff.

This new structure aligns with the SWI strategy, and I am sure that the new committees will champion the organisation going forward.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank retiring committee conveners Liz Hay, Jesse Mickle and Nan Brown and all of the retiring committee members for their hard work, enthusiasm and friendship across the year.

We ran several very enjoyable competitions and thanks must go to the host Federations for their hard work. Thanks also to all the Federations who sent in their annual reports this year.

We were honoured to host the Associated Country Women of the World's European area conference last September. Members travelled from Australia, South Africa, Canada and Europe and very much enjoyed the Scottish hospitality. Thank you to all the SWI members, Federations and staff who contributed to making this event so successful.

Our review of the SWI counts everything from membership income, through to members' expenses for competitions, a review of all contracts with suppliers, and overheads. We have created short, medium and long term plans to reduce the costs.

One of the key actions was to sell Heriot Row, which was under-utilised, expensive to maintain and not fit for purpose as an office or accessible as a member space. I'm pleased to tell you it is now sold subject to the signing of the missives.

The proceeds from the sale will increase the investment income and develop an ambitious new SWI Visitor Centre somewhere in Scotland.

The SWI's online shop has been revamped and we are looking to sell branded items that will be attractive to members such as non plastic merchandise and craft kits.

We will ensure that all SWI events and competitions, such as the National Conference in Perth this September, are affordable for members. But most importantly break even, too. It is important to explore additional income streams from sources such as commercial exhibitors and sponsors.

We have been successful in applying for and securing a range of small pots of funding from Rural Action Scotland and Inspiring Scotland. This funding is restricted to membership growth in rural areas and to match up trading heritage funding. However, when we transition to the Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) model, we will be much more attractive to funders as this will reduce financial risks for both them and us.

Our final aim is to be ambitious for the future. Digital transformation, changing tastes and public perception of the SWI all present challenges for us but if we grasp these, they become opportunities.

The Board aims to develop a Visitor Learning Centre for women in Scotland. This is an ambitious vision but one which will offer all members a place to meet, learn and socialise, as well as share and develop their skills further. We want to champion our charitable aims of advancing education for all women in Scotland, while educating future generations about our heritage and history over the past 106 years.

Our flagship Visitor Learning Centre will allow visitors to experience our heritage, experiment with learning and get a taste of the friendships we share and the social inclusion we offer while building their confidence and wellbeing.

We envisage the Visitor Learning Centre to be enterprising, generating a significant amount of income from a cafe while being a central recruitment space for women in Scotland. We acknowledge that there is work to be done, and challenges ahead, but we will transform the SWI into an attractive organisation for women in the future.

The Board and staff are all proud of these accomplishments in 2022 but we must remain focused on the key ethos and values of the SWI.

As we enter the new triennium, we welcome new Board members with key skills to take forward the next phase of the strategy.

Although I am stepping down as President, I am happy to remain on the Board and I will ensure I always do my very best for this wonderful organisation. I am delighted to hand over to our new very capable President Mary Burney, who will take over the reins at this important time. Mary has many years' experience and will be a fantastic President. Congratulations, Mary – all the very best for the future.

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The tech team

Many thanks to members Kathleen Hewson, Maz Thorn and Pauline Brown who helped to ensure the smooth running of this year's AGM.

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AGM 2023

Members' voices

Karen Johnson, one of SWI's Board trustees, hosted this year's membership panel session, offering a platform for members to talk about turning challenges into opportunities. The session also provided some celebration about the new membership groups which have been springing up around the country, and a look forward to the National Conference in September.

SC&WP Federation Secretary

Margaret Crawford

Margaret spoke about the challenges faced by SC&WP Federation which almost led to the Federation's closure when no office bearers could be attracted. Now a more flexible approach has been adopted, so what lessons can be learned from how they managed to turn things around?

Immediate Past National President

Linda Retson

Linda spoke about this year's upcoming National Conference and Exhibition and why the event will be a spectacular showcase for all the SWI has to offer. Linda is also looking forward to hosting the SWI Junior Dippers' craft zone during the Family Evening Market.

Bathgate Belles SWI member

Kylie Middleton

New member Kylie spoke about how her perception of the SWI changed when she went along to a Bathgate Belles get-together. Initially, she wasn't sure if she would fit in or be welcomed but now she is enjoying all the opportunities open to her and is learning from fellow members.

Kinross Women's Group members

Jessica Munro, Debbie Baird and Rosalind Lamont

Jessica told us how a small pot of rural funding was used to grow three new groups in Perth & Kinross. She also talked about how the Kinross ladies are now taking a fresh approach to their group by splitting responsibilities in a more relaxed way. With everything from sari tying to wine tasting it has been a fun time for the Kinross ladies!

Whithorn SWI founder member

Allison Scott

Allison has first-hand knowledge of the challenges of launching a group in a remote rural location, and how to sustain interest in a smaller community. She spoke about appealing to a range of age groups and post-Covid enthusiasm.

Cousland Institute members

Gemma Torry & Lorraine Chapman

Gemma and Lorraine shared their experience of how they saved their Rural. The pair begged for time to help turn things around and managed to refresh and re-energise Cousland SWI. Just how did they manage to inspire women in the village and gain members.

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Incoming President

Mary Burney

Mary ended the AGM with a tribute to Anne Kerr and a look to the future...

"My sincere thanks to Anne and I'm looking forward to continuing where she left off, and to further progressing the organisation's strategy.

Having completed the Board recruitment process, I'm pleased to welcome the appointment of five new board members who will bring new skills and perspectives to the SWI.

I would just like to say a few words of thanks, firstly, and especially to Anne. I think apart from the war years, her term as President must be one of the most unusual in the history of the SWI. She was elected the first of the new Board of Trustees, but before a meeting could be called the country went into lockdown. This was expected to be a short while, but when it wasn't, she moved to meetings online.

Born of necessity, Zoom became an integral part of the organisation, which encouraged members to keep in touch when they couldn't meet face to face.

When our then CEO Raymond Pratt made the decision to retire, it was another unexpected challenge which Anne took in her stride. It was just one of the many challenges and changes that occurred during what was a very strange time for everybody.

By the time things started to open up, we were able to meet together again, the SWI had a new CEO, a new staff team, a new strategy, a new normal, I think Anne's T-shirt should say, 'Kept calm and carried on'.

So, on behalf of the members, I'd like to thank Anne for all of the time and hard work she dedicated to furthering the interests of the SWI, not only as President, but over the many years before that with the enthusiasm she brought to every situation. And for the nonstop encouragement that kept us all going. Anne will be a hard act to follow but I already have her on speed dial!

Many thanks to you all for attending the AGM and for your input.

Our thanks to Maz, Pauline, and Kath who helped facilitate the meeting. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow trustees, committee members and members on the panel, plus our CEO and excellent staff team for their help, guidance and friendship. I look forward to working with them and for you over the next three years.

I'd also I just like to say how much I'm looking forward to working with the new Board. We're all there for the same purpose. And that is to progress the SWI for the benefit of the membership. That will be our challenge.

There will be lots of new, interesting things to tackle and it will be slightly scary but I'm sure as Rural ladies we will all rise to that challenge.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as I can over the next three years."

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New committees take shape

Delivering the SWI's strategic plan is, of course, the priority for all members involved at National level.

The purpose of the new strategy is to transform the SWI into a sustainable organisation and members will, of course, help to shape our future. The Board has agreed a Skills & Events Committee and a Finance Committee will be best suited to work on this.

Each committee has now met and it's great to see the enthusiasm on display as they all work together to ensure the SWI is attractive to more women in Scotland. Thanks go to...

Skills & Events Committee

- Anne Howat, Ayrshire (Convenor)
- Lynne Bilton, Berwickshire
- Margaret Dick, Dunbartonshire
- Dorothy Morris, Perth & Kinross
- Brenda Macleod, Argyll
- Pat Cooper, Kincardineshire
- Joyce Carnegie, Perth & Kinross
- Clare Greig, Dunbartonshire
- Mima Telfer, Dumfriesshire
- Kathleen Ferrier, Angus
- Sheelagh Still, Mull
- Marsha Adams, Fife
- Margaret Young, Dumfriesshire
- Jessie Meikle, Lanarkshire

Finance Committee

- May Tosh, Argyll (Convenor)
- Helen Braid, Dumfriesshire
- Edith Christie, Perth & Kinross
- Janice Dagg, East Lothian
- Rita Storr, Ross-shire & Sutherland
- Beryl Brodie, West Lothian
- Wilma Burns, Roxburghshire

A year of successes

2022 was a year of challenges and achievements and the SWI is positively progressing to meet the key aims of the strategy and transforming into a sustainable, attractive organisation which is fit for the future.

Implementing transformational change

This year saw working practices reformed to ensure the organisation's strategy is rolled out efficiently.

Action taken

- A staff restructure took place with a greater emphasis on events, membership and communications.
- The SWI is now a Living Wage employer, so can attract the right calibre of employees.
- Digital working has been introduced to reduce costs and resources.
- Members have embraced booking events online or subscribing to the new online magazine. The magazine now reaches three times as many members as it did this time last year.
- The SWI's digital reach across Scotland's communities has expanded and is proactively changing the public perception of the SWI into one that is inclusive and modern.
- The SWI continues to advance education for all women by providing online training to our members, Board trustees, and staff. For members this has included lifelong learning sessions in public speaking, social media, skills sharing and health and wellbeing.
- New office bearer peer groups meet bi-monthly to discuss and resolve any membership issues. This supports the network of governance across our Federations and offers office bearers a useful sounding board.
- The Board has progressed a review of the SWI's charitable status and constitution as the organisation transitions to becoming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO).

Growing the membership

With a 30% decline in membership post-Covid, efforts have been focussed on driving growth while maintaining existing members.

Action taken

- A membership drive toolkit was created for members to use to raise awareness of their groups. This included sharable social media images, flyers, and posters with testimonials from members and kickstarted a new momentum of membership growth.

- Throughout the year, the new CEO and National President visited many events, Institutes and Federations to hear existing members' views.
- 60 Federation office bearers attended the official launch of the new three-year strategy in September.
- During the year, the committees worked closely with the staff to organise many traditional national competitions and events. The new Board and committees will be tasked with making improvements and simplifying national events and competitions.
- Online events are doing well, and non-members are now being charged to attend these, so this income stream can be developed further.
- New groups have been set up in the past 8 months and members from nearby Institutes and Federations continue to support them until they are fully established. Key learnings from these groups will inform the new constitution but ultimately these new members want the same things all women want; friendship, learning and fun!

Reduce our overheads and achieve financial sustainability

The SWI's only income stream is membership fees and in the past couple of years our financial outgoings have far exceeded our income. The organisation has heavily relied on utilising investments to fill the gap but this is not sustainable long term. We must reduce overheads to ensure we have a financially sustainable future.

Action taken

- 2022 saw a review of the SWI costs for everything from membership income to membership expenses for competitions.
- A review of all contracts, suppliers, and overheads was conducted and we have created short, medium, and long-term actions to reduce costs.
- A key action was to sell the office in Heriot Row. The building was underutilised, expensive to maintain and not fit for purpose or accessible as an office or member space. The sale has now been agreed and its proceeds will inflate the investment income to further the case of developing an ambitious SWI visitor learning centre in Scotland.
- The SWI shop has been revamped and we are looking to sell branded items that will be attractive to members such as non-plastic merchandise and craft kits.
- We will ensure that all SWI events and competitions such as the National Conference in September is affordable to members but importantly breaks even. Additional income will be sought from other sources such as commercial exhibitors and sponsors.
- We have been successful in applying and securing a range of small pots of funding from Rural Action in Scotland and Inspiring Scotland.

Ambition for the future

The SWI wants to champion its charitable aims of advancing education for all women in Scotland while educating the future generation of our heritage and history over the past 106 years.

Action taken

- The Board is working to develop a visitor learning centre for women in Scotland which will offer all members a place to meet, learn, socialise, and share and develop their skills further. This flagship visitor centre will allow visitors to experience the SWI's heritage, experiment with learning, and get a taste of friendship, confidence, social inclusion and health and wellbeing.

- To build up to the ambitious Visitor Learning Centre project, we have made inroads with implementing craft workshops, curating our heritage and history, and selling craft kits in our online shop.
- We are engaging with like-minded organisations and external partners for potential capital funding. Becoming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) will extend the reach to funders as this reduces the financial risk the current governance structure leaves the SWI open to.

There's lots more to do!

Picture perfect

The best stories from home and away

Presidents past and present, conveners, and members made a long trip to Malaysia for the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) World Conference in Kuala Lumpur in May – and they were treated like royalty! They got to meet Her Majesty Queen Azizah of Malaysia and members of the ACWW conference organising committee from the Women’s Institute of Pahang, Malaysia.

The West Lothian Federation’s 65th Annual Show was a wonderful, jampacked event. Well done to all the ladies for the smooth organisation and running of the show, some even had time for a revitalising cuppa. Big congratulations to all the members who entered their beautiful items from cakes and cushions to pictures and patchworkswhat an amazing showcase of skills from SWI members in the area.

20 members of Musselburgh’s new SWI Women's Group had a fantastic beauty demonstration for their first proper meeting. Find out more about the Musselburgh group here: rb.gy/xz1jc

April's Stadium Bowling competition was won by the Ayrshire 2 team from Moscow SWI. Runners up were Dunbartonshire Federation. Congratulations to you all! Thanks to Ayrshire Federation for hosting the event at Auchinleck Bowling Club.

A very successful National Quiz and Matter of Opinion competition was held in Banchory Town Hall in April. Quiz winners were Maryculter SWI of Kincardineshire Federation, with runners up Ewes SWI of Dumfriesshire Federation. Gilmourton SWI of Lanarkshire Federation won the Matter of Opinion competition with runners up were Marykirk SWI of Kincardineshire Federation. Gilmourton SWI brought Best Chairman, Marion Law, and Best Panel Member Sarah Mateer. Thank you to Kincardineshire Federation for hosting!

We were delighted to welcome Ross-shire & Sutherland Federation's team – new group Tarra Gal SWI.

Thank you!