

Dr Valentina Bold, Heritage Manager  
Elizabeth Bryan, Volunteer Co ordinator

# Heritage Project 2025 - 27



Made possible with The  
National Lottery  
Heritage Fund, thanks to  
National Lottery players.

# SWI Heritage Project

## Introduction

- Aims
- Core Team
- Targets
- Structure

## Past to Present

- International
- Enfranchisement
- Growth
- Ethos
- Core Skills

## The HLF Project

- Approaches
- Oral Histories
- Archives
- Volunteering
- Dissemination
- Podcasts

## Phase Two



## Aims

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**“to reconstruct the past and to understand the life of days gone by”**

*Eunice G. Murray, Scottish Women’s Rural Institutes member, champion of rural museums and social history, writing in 1947*

and to share this knowledge within the SWI membership and beyond





# Core Team

**Heritage Group Chair** Susie Finlayson

**Project Manager** Dr Valentina Bold

**Volunteer Co ordinator** Elizabeth Bryan

**Archivist** Rachael Muir

Thanks to

**The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

# Targets

## **Digitisation of SWI Archives**

- Magazines, photos
- Correspondence, minutes
- Slides

## **Archiving**

- 60 volunteers, 1200 hours
- On-site (Ballast) and remote

## **Oral Histories**

- 120 volunteers, 2400 hours
- 10 Podcasts for website

## **New Website**

## **Intergenerational Skills Transfer Workshops**

- Six, in partnership

## **Third Sector Knowledge Sharing Event**

## **Parliamentary Reception**

# Delivery

**June 2026**

**Sept 2026**

**July 2026**

**June 2025**

**July 2026**

**March 2026**

**End of Project**

# On track?

Achieved: Magazines 1924 - 1965

Catherine Blair correspondence

NDS slides. Cookery Books

Yes: 30 volunteers with new tranche in '26.

Yes: 60 trained volunteers

Yes: Already live.

Yes.

Yes: Young Women's Movement, WHALE Arts,

Dundee International Women's cENTRE

# Structure

## Member-led, across Scotland

- Monthly **online meetings**
- Quarterly **Newsletter**
- **Volunteering**
- **Training workshops**

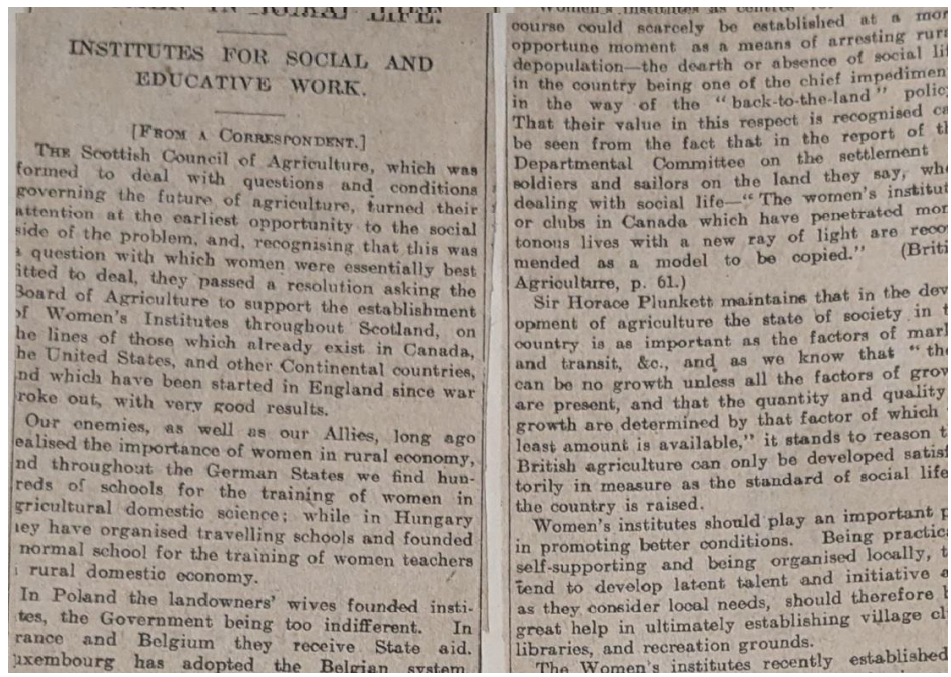
## Reporting

- HLF (quarterly)
- Board
- Archives (monthly)
- CEO (fortnightly)
- HM and VC (weekly)

**Images: SWI volunteers** (top left clockwise): Archive Cataloguing, Johnstone; Planning Meeting, Dingwall; Oral History Training, Perth; Planning meeting, Hawick; Oral History Training, Muir of Ord.



# InteMovement



## Canadian beginnings

(1887, f. Church of Scotland Women's Guilds)

**1897** (Feb 12): **Adelaide Hoodless**, domestic science campaigner and YWCA branch President speaks to Farmer's Institute Ladies Night in **Saltfleet (now Stoney Creek)** Ontario. First WI founded.

**1905** 130 Canadian Institutes

**1919** Federated Women's Institutes of Canada

## International movement (USA, Europe, NZ, SA)

**1915** (Sept) Llanfairpwyl, Wales; (Nov) Sussex, England

**1917** National Federation of Women's Institutes, England

## Associated Countrywomen of the World 1927

### Early focus on / founding members experienced in

- Community education, agricultural improvements
- Women and children's rights
- Social opportunities for isolated women

### Context

- Suffrage Campaigning (Liberal Party) and Founder members

# Women's Enfranchisement, Scotland

**1872 Women can vote, and stand**, on new 986 **School Boards** if own / occupy land over £4 annual value **Education (Scotland) Act**

**1873** first elections to School Boards, committee campaign for 'lady candidates'

**1881/2** Women ratepayers enfranchised in **Burgh elections** (town / police burghs)

**1882 Scottish National Demonstration of Women**, Glasgow

**1889** Women ratepayers gain right to vote for new **County Councils**

**1894 – 1929** Women qualified for County Council / Municipal Registers **gain right to vote and stand for Parish Councils**. Local Government (Scotland) Act. 'Association for promoting the return of ladies as members of Parochial Boards' (dissolved 1895) includes **Mrs Forbes**

**1906 Women's Social & Political Union** (WSPU, f.1903 Manchester) est Scotland

**1907 Women right to stand for Town Council** (not, if Chair / Provost, Baillie or JP)

**1909 Gude Cause Demonstration** for suffrage, **Edinburgh** organizes by WSPU, led by

Flora Drummond (The General); Pageant of Historical Women

**1913 First Woman Provost of Town Council** (Lavinia Malcolm, Dollar)

**1913 Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act** (Cat and Mouse Act – force feeding; Liberal govt); **Catherine Blair, WSPU member, supports released at Hoprig**

**Mains; husband Thomas Blair resigns as Vice-President of local Liberal Party**

**1918 Representation of the People Act:** votes for women over 30 with property; Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act: **Women can stand for Parliament**

**1919 Edinburgh first City to elect a woman Councillor**

**1919 Eunice Murray, first woman Parliamentary Candidate Scotland (Women's**

**Freedom League campaigner; stands as Independent, Glasgow Bridgeton**

**1920 Women can stand for Justice of the Peace**

**1928 Representation of the People Act:** women over 21 can now vote in elections

**1929 First election with votes for women over 21**, 'the Flapper Election'

# History



Longniddry Branch SWRI, 1957 © SWI Longniddry Branch.

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## 1916

- **13th Dec Catherine Blair addresses Glasgow & West Scotland Discussion Society: 'The Farmhouse in Relation to Food Supply & Labour.** She advocates WIs in Scotland to **'help in food production and conservation'**
- **Blair corresponds with John Nugent Harris,** Irish-born Gen Secretary of the **English Agricultural Organization Society** and Secretary of the WI Committee. Mrs Harris Elizabeth Frances Crawford active in movement.
- **Blair represents women's interests in new Scottish Council of Agriculture.**

## 1917

- **April: Board of Agriculture adopts** Scottish Council of Agriculture's resolution to **support Women's institutes.**
- **25<sup>th</sup> July:** At the first SWRI meeting, Longniddry, Aberdeen-born **Louisa Innes Lumsden LLD,** later Dame (suffrage campaigner, educator) **"to give women the opportunity of meeting together for comparison of methods in the practical work of the country home, for the exchange of ideas and the consequent sharpening of wits, and for the pleasure of social intercourse".**

# Growth



**26<sup>th</sup> June 1917, Longniddry, first meeting towards founding SWRI (37 founding members)**

- **Chaired by Blair** (later first President)
- **Addressed by Madge Robertson Watt MA** (Mrs Alfred Watt), Ontario-born WI organiser and writer and Advisory Board member, British Columbia WI.

**27<sup>th</sup> June 1917, Goold Hall Edinburgh, sponsored by Board of Agriculture**

- **Watt** (Speaker); **Lady Isobel Carlaw** (Mrs Martin) Dundee / Edinburgh educational theorist / children's gardening campaigner, Liberal; Mrs Hamilton; **Mrs Forbes** (suffragist),
- Miss Anderson (small holders); Miss Jobson (farmworkers' wives); Blair (farmers' wives)
- Board of Agriculture: **Sir Robert Wright** (Chair); Dr (later Sir) Robert Greig, Vice-Chair
- Secretary of Scotland: **Mr Munro** (Lord Alness)

**Board of Agriculture appoints Organiser Clerk (2 years ), then 'central control body'**

- Organizer 'called away; Blair: voluntary organiser and fund raiser
- Advisors: Mrs Gooch (experience of English WI); Miss E.B. Mitchell LLB (Canadian)
- Canadian magazines inspire slogan: "If you know a good thing, pass it on"

**1917 Milnathort Institute, second in Scotland: the movement begins**

**By 1950s: 50, 000 members across Scotland**

**Now: 29 Federations, 400 + Institutes, 8 800 members**

## Ethos: “If you know a good thing, pass it on”

“We had wonderful syllabuses [...] Miss E. H. Jacob, B.S.c., gave a lecture on “Flies and How to Get Rid of Them.” Her diagrams live in our memory to this day” At the next meeting Lady Wemyss took the Chair, and we had Miss Nannie Brown’s address on “Famous Scotswomen” [...] On different occasions we had **Mrs. Nell Drew, who had done some of the embroidery for Holyrood, showing some beautiful embroidery** [...] One snowy night **Miss Chart and Mrs Morley Fletcher came to give us our first lesson on embroidery, bringing with them embroidered mats done by the Frenchwomen behind the guns at Verdun**, work which, the women said, “helped them to keep their sanity.” those of us who had menfolk at the front could well understand this [...] Sometimes our meetings were begun with silent prayer. We sent parcels to the soldiers, collected money for the Mine-sweepers’ Fund, and did what we could for the Red Cross.” **Catherine Blair, *Rural Journey* (1940), p.32.**



**SWRI rug making group Lerwick, 1920s: Cairding & spinning:** Margaret Stout, Maggie Stout (née Mainland), Annie Stout, Jessie Henderson, Laura Malcolmson, Charlotte Smith, Annie Goodlad, Barbara Smith, Babsie Burgess (née Williamson). @Shetland Museum & Archives. Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).

# Core Skills

## Food, Arts, Crafts

**Cookery** “not to teach the cottage woman how to make a simple supper [but...] to show what could be done to make an excellent and nutritious meal of five or six courses with home produce for the table” (C. Blair)

**Textiles and Needlework** “the skill of the people is one of the greatest assets in our country, but it is essential that the country people see the skill of able craftsmen, so that their own ideas may be stimulated. The creative facility is a joy, and its exercise helps to soothe the mind” (C. Blair)

**Ceramics: Mak Merry Pottery, East Lothian (f.1920 – c.1940)**

- Began in Garden shed, Hoprig Mains
- Blair ‘Chief Painter’; Betty Wright, grieve’s daughter, Assistant
- Teach Classes; Sell Highland Shows (Queen Mary; Queen Mother)

**Applied Art:** “We can learn the art of appreciation of the daily freshness of beautiful things, and the art of mastery over their use” (C. Blair)





# The Heritage Project

By and For Members



# Activities

**Archives** (Cataloguing, Digitisation)

**Oral Histories** (Recording Memories)

**Sharing Heritage** (Skills, Podcasts, Events)



**Images** (clockwise from top left)

Home and Country 1930, Digitized

Embroidery sample, SWI Archives

May MacCormick, SWI Tutor, Sanquhar

# Oral Histories

## Training sessions across Scotland

- Edinburgh
- Muir of Ord
- Perth
- Dumfries
- Kirkwall
- Online

## Sessions support members to

- Be ethically and legally responsible
- Be Data Use and Access Act (formerly GRPR) compliant
- Use Participant Information and Informed Consent forms
- Safeguarding & Signposting)
- Interview (practical exercises)
- Make digital recordings
- Process AI-led transcriptions



# Volunteer Historians



## Currently

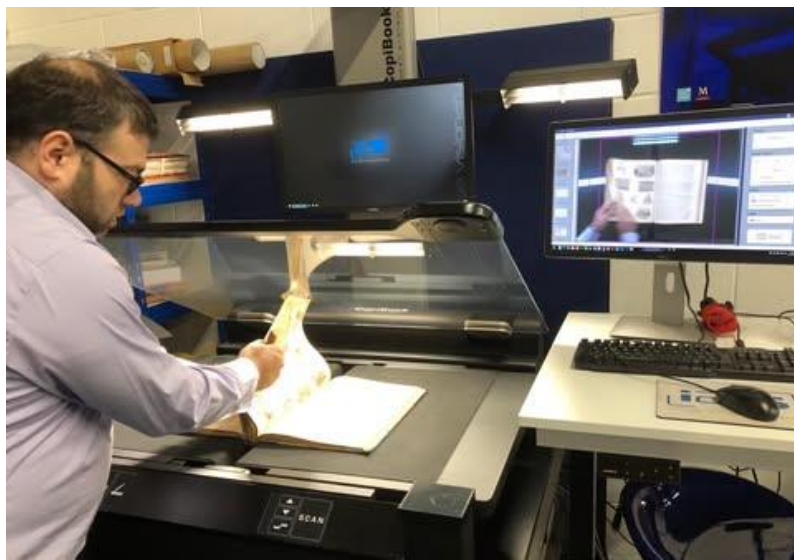
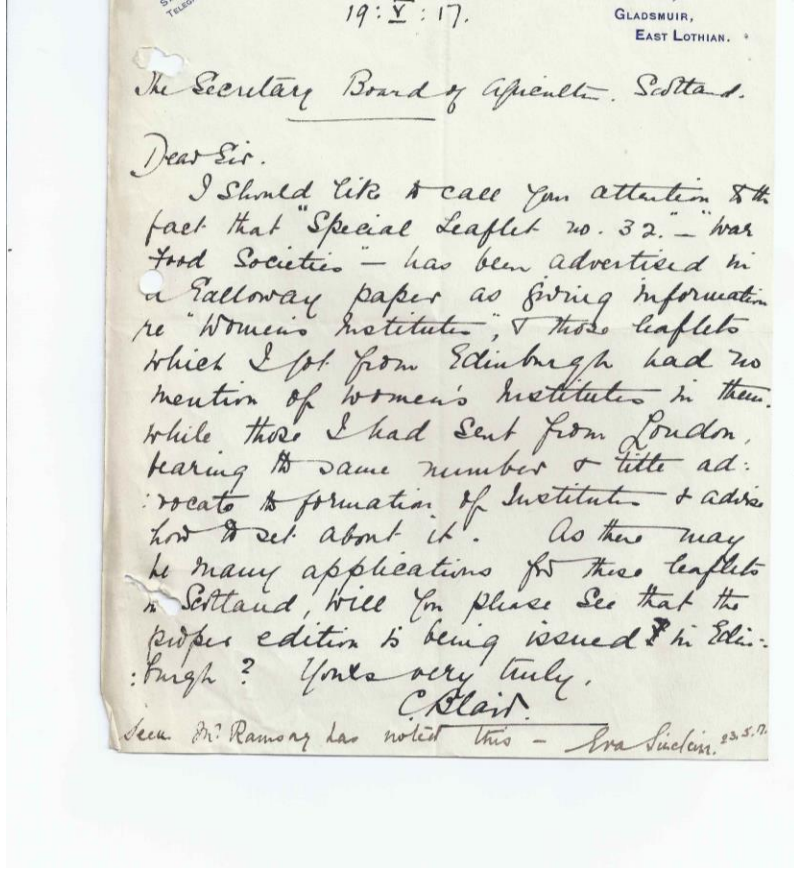
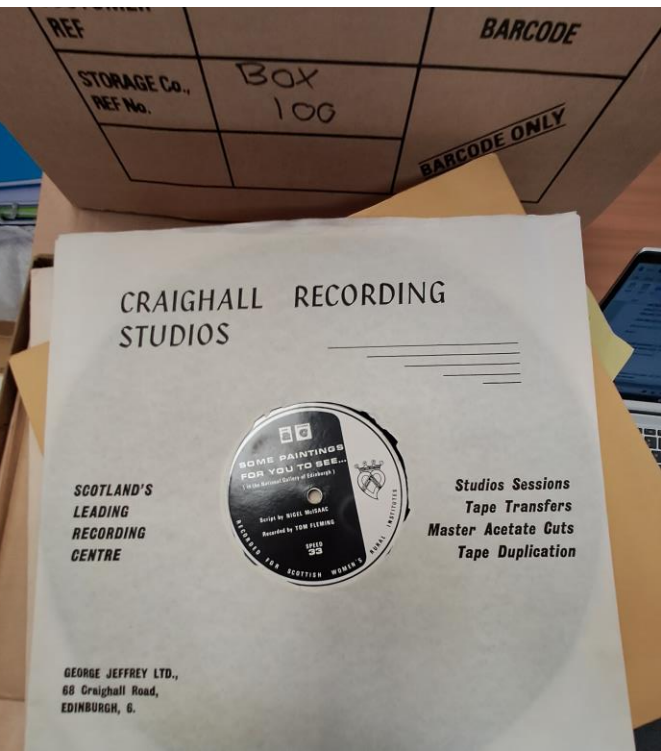
- 60 + trained members
- 13 actively recording
- Approx 40 hours to date of peer-to-peer recordings

## Equipment

- 6 Zoom recording kits: 2 in Edinburgh; 1 Dingwall, 1 Dumfries, 1 Aberdeen, 1 Ballast Trust
- Borrowing arrangements: Hawick Heritage Hub; Elphinstone Institute; AK Bell Library

## Issues

- Require technical support (varying competence)
- Transfer of kit between members



# Archives

## Storage and Cataloguing, The Ballast Trust, Johnstone

### Digitisation, Autodocs: Digital files (jpeg, tiff, pdfs)

- Home and Country 1924 – 1965
- Needlework Development Scheme textiles 1934 – 1961
- Cookery Books 1925 – 1972
- Gramophone Recordings
- Records and Minutes

### SWI Volunteers, Johnstone and remote: currently 30

- Trained by Archivist, supported by Volunteer Co Ordinator
- Cataloguing, authority files, bespoke projects
- Five week blocks (Johnstone); at your own base (remote)

# Archival Volunteering from home

## Thirteen members, started August 2025

- Volunteers from across Scotland
- Determine their own time for, and pace of, work
- Online meeting every six weeks
- Supplied with pdfs of '**Home and Country**' (1930s/40s)

## Support the Archivist, making Catalogue searchable

- Record key topics, people, places
- Document development of SWI locally & nationally
- Enhance understanding of Institute foundations, and change over time.



# Skills Transfer Workshops



## **Crafts-based**

- Skilled Member Tutors
- Intergenerational
- Partnership

## **Partnership events: four over 2025, two in 2026 including:**

- Pyrography, Young Women's Movement (Edinburgh) July 2025
- Needlefelting, International Women's Centre (Dundee) Sept 2025
- Sanquhar Knitting with Royal Society of Edinburgh (in Dumfries) Sept 2025
- Needlefelting, WHALE Arts (Wester Hailes), Dec 2025
- Double Workshop Day, Feb 2026 details tbc.

# Dissemination



## **Presentations (Conferences, events, podcasts)**

- ‘Connecting Communities’, **Scottish Council on Archives**, Glasgow March 2025
- “If you know a good thing, pass it on: Making Histories Together’, **Oral History Society**, Glasgow June 2025
- Summer School **Heritage Evening** August 2025
- “Mak Merry: Friendships, Crafting and Scottish Women’s Institutes’, **Royal Society of Edinburgh’s ‘Curious Festival’**, September 2025
- **Institutes and Federations** including Leith, Glenfarg, Orkney (Nov 2025)
- **Volunteer Celebration**, December 2025
- **Knowledge Sharing Event**, March 2026
- **Needlework Development Scheme**, 2026.



**Website** Creatomatic, Lockerbie

**Heritage Highlighted** especially through

### **Podcasts**

**Up Next Studios, Glasgow**

- Catherine Blair
- Archiving
- The War Years
- Cooking
- County Shows
- SWI Abroad
- Heritage Crafts
- Zooms during Covid
- Friendship
- Today's SWI

# Podcasts

# “Guardians of the Past, Custodians of the Present” (Murray, 1947):

## Phase 2 (2 years)

### SWI Book

#### An Integrated Archive

- Institutes, Federations, National
- D & G, NLS, NMS

#### 110<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations (2027)

- Learning Centre opens: digital?
- Exhibitions: women’s histories
- Workshops and events
- Community Outreach programme

