



## **Welcome to Heritage News - Spring 2026**

This is a print-friendly version of the Scottish Women's Institutes quarterly heritage project newsletter.

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 SCIO, SC053058

## Heritage project update for members

We are now two thirds of the way through our Heritage Lottery funded project (January 2025–January 2027) and are delighted to report that we are well on track.

20 of our 28 Federations have now taken part, contributing through archival and oral history volunteering, and we are hugely grateful to every woman involved. We are still keen to hear from our remaining eight Federations: Angus, Argyll, Arran, Berwickshire, Caithness, Kincardineshire, Lanarkshire, and Peeblesshire. Please get in touch at [valentina.bold@theswi.org.uk](mailto:valentina.bold@theswi.org.uk).

**Archive & Digitisation:** The digitisation of our key holdings is almost complete. We now have a full digital run of Home and Country magazine (1924–2015), alongside cookery books, recorded lectures, slides, and materials from the JP Coates Needlework Development Scheme (1934–1961). 25 women across Scotland are working at either the Ballast Trust or their own home to catalogue the SWI collections.

**Oral Histories:** We now have nearly seventy hours of recordings from across Scotland, from Shetland to Selkirkshire.

### Other Highlights

- Six intergenerational skills transfer workshops have been delivered in partnership with Creative Crafts
- Our member podcast series is now complete and has been well received both in Scotland and internationally
- We have passed the first round of consideration for the new UK Living Heritage UNESCO list, with our entry on Community Drama and the SWI, we expect to hear the outcome within six months.

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### **A history worth preserving...**

Dr. Charlie Lynch spent time with Heritage Manager Valentina Bold to chronicle the important work that the Heritage project is capturing. His article for The National newspaper provides readers with a small window in the origins of the SWI, how the heritage project is evolving and how the history of the SWI is of great interest to both current and prospective members.

## **An inspiring afternoon with Mary Fleming**

"I have been a member of quite a few societies and the SWRI is the best one. The actual setup of the SWRI was excellent. The way that it was evolved, everybody was involved... The camaraderie was tremendous, and when you went to another 'rural', then you knew the drill, and you always got an awful good tea!"

Mary Fleming

Heritage Project Volunteer Coordinator Elizabeth Bryan and Heritage Volunteer Brenda McLean visited Mary to interview her for the SWI Heritage Project.

Mary's memories of 'the Rural' took them back to the early 1940s. As a wee girl she had played the fiddle for the country dancing at the Greenhill Institute in Lanarkshire, where her aunts were founding members. It was fascinating hearing stories of Mary's thirty-year involvement in the Amulree SWRI and Hillside SWRI, especially the fun of the concert parties, the crafting and the Shows. In 2005 Mary returned to Edinburgh and became a member of the Corstorphine Institute, which her mother and grandmother had helped to found back in 1922. Here she helped write a history of Heriot Row and was a stalwart of the Drama Group.

During the visit, Mary provided SWI photographs, articles and songs which she had written over the years. Her pride in the organisation made for a truly inspiring afternoon, and her recording will help future researchers understand why the 'Rural' has been and continues to be so important to members.

Thank you, Mary, and thank you to everyone who is helping the Heritage Project by giving their story to the archive.

## **We've been featured by the National Lottery Heritage Fund!**

We're thrilled to share that the SWI heritage project has been featured in a Q&A with the National Lottery Heritage Fund!

We talked honestly about the work involved, what we've learned and shared our experience of bringing the SWI's history to life. From the early planning stages to where we are now, it's been quite a journey, have a read and see what we've been up to as part of the heritage project

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## **From past to future: SWI heritage inspires young minds**

Working alongside the Glasgow School of Art and local schoolchildren, the SWI provided children's items from our archive to inspire creativity and imagination. Exploring these objects encouraged pupils to connect with heritage in meaningful ways, helping them develop ideas, express themselves, and understand how the past can inspire future generations.

Want to know more about this project? Get in touch by emailing [hello@theswi.org.uk](mailto:hello@theswi.org.uk)

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## **A heritage visit to Glenfarg**

Thank you to members from Glenfarg Institute, Perth & Kinross Federation, who welcomed Heritage Manager Dr Valentina Bold at the monthly meeting on 12 March. Valentina gave a short presentation about the Heritage Project, and was very grateful to have the chance to speak with, and record, several members of Glenfarg Institute and the wider conversation, during a group discussion as well as one to one.

Perthshire has been one of the most active areas in our Heritage project, and it was lovely to meet with the ladies who have been busy recording members, and archiving from home. Valentina passes on her sincere thanks to all involved, particularly Chairperson Linda Martin and Secretary Joyce Clark, for making this such an enjoyable, and successful visit.

## **Shining a light on the Needlework Development Scheme**

January marked the launch of a new partnership between the Scottish Women's Institutes and the Glasgow School of Art Rural Lab, spearheaded by SWI CEO Diane Cooper.

A special reception brought together a growing creative community to honour the legacy of craft, nurture new relationships, and imagine future collaborative possibilities.

Drawing on a curated selection of textiles from the SWI & GSA Archives, including works from the historic Needlework Development Scheme (1934–1961), the pioneering collaboration between industry and art education, opened rich conversations around cultural heritage, learning, and contemporary craft practice.

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## **Meet heritage volunteer Jo Ozga**

I first came across the Scottish Women's Institute archive a couple of years ago when I was a student at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. My dissertation was on the National Medicinal Plant Scheme of World War Two and the essential the role of Women's Institutes in its delivery, which helped to ensure that Britain was kept supplied with essential medicines during the war.

My involvement as a volunteer has been to research background information for the archives catalogue. One of my first tasks was to research brief biographies of past Chairmen (the name changed to President in 2019). Up until 1993 Chairmen were referred to by their title, initial and surname and in some cases, as was customary at that time, the initials were those of their husband. Providing each past Chairman with their own individual identity felt like an important step in this process and in recognising the important role that they each played in the organisation.

From my research the SWI archives contain multitudes of women like Sybil Murray whose name, life and work are unknown and unrecognised. As the archives are catalogued it will hopefully make it easier for future researchers to uncover these women's lives and work.

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## **Exploring the heritage of the islands**

In November, President Mary Burney, Vice President Susie Finlayson and Heritage Manager Dr Valentina Bold spent three packed days with the Orkney Federation, based in Kirkwall. They were treated to excellent hospitality, as well as opportunities to participate in workshops on embroidery and an oral history training session.

Valentina was also able to spend a fascinating morning in the Orkney Archives, looking at the many Institute and Federation records held in its collection. The Federation organised several opportunities for members to meet and talk with the delegation informally during this stay, including a memorable and delicious dinner in the Albert Hotel.

Thanks to all the ladies who made this visit so enjoyable, and productive, particularly to Orkney Federation President Alison Aitken and Secretary Caroline Hide.

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## **Dates for your diary**

### **Online Heritage Group**

The Heritage group meet on a monthly basis to progress and contribute to the wider SWI Heritage project, with a focus on preparing the SWI Heritage for a sustainable future. The December meeting, due to the festive season, has been rescheduled.

The next three dates are:

Thursday 26 March 2026, 6 pm – 7 pm

Thursday 30 April, 6 pm – 7 pm

Thursday 28 May, 6 pm – 7 pm

### **Online Oral History Clinic**

This monthly drop-in session is open to existing SWI oral history volunteers. Chaired by the Heritage Manager, Dr Valentina Bold, it offers an opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion about recording and processing oral histories -- and any challenges that arise along the way.

The next two dates are:

Wednesday 13 May 2026, 12 pm – 1 pm

Wednesday 10 June 12 pm – 1 pm

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### **New oral historian training**

**Friday 1 May 2026 10:30 am – 1 pm**

Want to capture the voices and stories that matter? Join Dr Valentina Bold, SWI Heritage Manager, for a friendly online introduction to recording and processing oral histories, no prior experience needed.

Delivered as part of the SWI's Heritage Project, the session includes practical interviewing exercises, slides, and take-away resources. Places are limited, so register soon.

Sign up via the SWI eventbrite

### **Oral history refresher training**

**Friday 24 April 2026 2 pm – 4 pm**

For people who have already attended a training session. This refresher session will review the skills you need to be an oral historian, including operating the technology and transcription. We will also look at 'mentoring' opportunities.

Sign up via the SWI eventbrite

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## **A word from our friends**

### **Young Women's Movement**

Do you, or someone you know, have a story to share about the last 100 years of the YWCA in Scotland?

The Young Women's Movement, formerly known as YWCA Scotland, would love to speak to people who were involved in the YWCA in Scotland from 1924 to the present day.

They'd love to hear if you:

- Worked or volunteered for YWCA
- Stayed in a YWCA hostel
- Delivered or took part in activities or events with the YWCA

### **Women's grassroots activism toolkit**

The Women's Grassroots Activism Toolkit 100+, developed by London South Bank University with support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, brings together the knowledge of organisations representing over 200,000 women and turns it into tools you can use today.

What's inside?

The toolkit is designed for anyone doing the work – whether you're running a local women's group, organising your community, or part of a national membership body. Inside you'll find:

- A practical 100+ activism checklist
- Guidance on archiving and records management
- Ideas for storytelling and bringing in new generations
- Strategies for collaboration and joint campaigning
- Real examples of grassroots action
- Links to further training and resources

### **John Gray Centre 50th anniversary celebrations**

The John Gray Centre in Haddington is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of its Local History Centre, and we're proud to be part of the festivities.

Throughout 2026, the Centre is hosting a wonderful series of family and local history themed events to mark the occasion, and we have a date for your diary!

On 22 June, the Scottish Women's Institute East Lothian Federation will be hosting special flower arrangement and basket making workshops at the Centre.

Keep an eye on the John Gray Centre's events page for booking details as they become available, and why not explore some of the other fascinating talks and exhibitions planned across the year while you're there.

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**\*\*\*\*Member extras\*\*\*\*Member extras\*\*\*\***

**SWI Member Insurance**

Members are covered through SWI Public Liability Insurance when working with non-members (children and adults) such as the Junior Dippers workshops.

Please note: It's important to ensure that any event involving non-members (adults or children) is branded as a SWI event, and it is recommended to confirm that any event venue you use has public liability insurance.

**Access to SWI events**

Keep up-to-date with the exciting range of in-person and online events [here](#).

**Monthly newsletter**

Click [here](#) to subscribe to receive the latest news direct to your inbox. You won't be bombarded by spam. We are committed to keeping our members informed so your help makes all the difference!

**Communities on Facebook**

Don't miss out, join us on Facebook and keep abreast of what's happening for the SWI and across the membership in Scotland. Follow us [here](#)

**Do you want to receive event alerts?**

Subscribe to SWI's Eventbrite page here and never miss a thing.

**Do you want general news?**

Visit [www.theswi.org.uk](http://www.theswi.org.uk) for updates.

Contact us for any further information at SWI, Unit 8, 1 Carmichael Place, Edinburgh EH6 5PH or [hello@theswi.org.uk](mailto:hello@theswi.org.uk) or call 0131 225 1724.

Alternatively, if you have a grumble to share, please follow our complaints procedure [HERE](#) to ensure that you receive an appropriate and timely response.

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