

SWI ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Date: 24th May 2025

Held: via Zoom

In Attendance (Trustees)

National President, Mary Burney

National Vice President, Susie Finlayson

National Treasurer, May Tosh

Trustees: Anne Kerr, Linda McTurk, Karen Johnson, Clare Greig and Sybil Stuart

There was 101 attendees total at this event online.

In Attendance (Staff) - Diane Cooper, Pauline Burnett, Jacqui McGuire, Beth Spencer

Member Facilitators – Maz Thorn and Kath Hewson

Advisors – Jacqueline Whyte, Thomson Cooper Accountants

1. Opening, Welcome, Apologies, Declaration of Interest

The President, Mary Burney, welcomed members to the AGM. There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of Virtual AGM held on 18th May 2024

The minutes of the AGM held virtually on 18th May 2024 were proposed by Linda McTurk and seconded by Karen Johnson.

3. Skills and Events Committee Report

Convenor, Anne Howat, of the Skills and Events committee said a few words on the committee progress in the past year. The Skills & Events Committee reported a successful and forward-thinking year, with 10 meetings held and a strong attendance rate. Key achievements in 2024 included the expansion of the Evelyn Baxter Scholarship, development of the SWIFTS training programme, and delivery of popular national events such as the Study Tour and Summer School. The committee also introduced initiatives to modernise competitions, explore new sporting activities, and improve event accessibility and communications. Financial sustainability remained a focus, with adjustments to entry fees and a phased removal of external funding. Looking

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ahead, the committee aims to attract younger members, maintain engagement across all demographics, and ensure that events align with the SWI Strategic Plan.

4. Federations Annual Report

National President, Mary Burney thanked all Federations for submitting their annual reports, which once again showcased the SWI's vital role in community connection, creativity, and skill development. In 2024, Federations hosted a wide array of activities including craft classes, sports events like Ruralympics and bowling, social gatherings, and workshops in embroidery, crochet, dressmaking, and floral art. Despite ongoing challenges such as institute closures, membership decline, and weather disruptions, Federations remained committed to fostering local engagement.

Highlights included centenary celebrations in Orkney and Arran, the introduction of Junior Dippers craft sessions for children, and strong inter-Federation collaboration. Looking ahead, many Federations are planning to expand activities, trial hybrid meetings, and prioritise outreach to grow and sustain membership.

However, 26 Institutes closed this year, with only 3 new ones opening—underscoring the urgent need to address this imbalance.

A more detailed copy of the Federation Annual Reports is available on the website.

5. Trophy Winners Accountments

National President, Mary Burney then took the opportunity to announce this year's Trophy winners for the below awards. All winners are based on the information we have received in the Federation annual reports.

- The Barbara Brookshire Trophy is for the institute with the greatest number of new members during the year. It was awarded to Kirkholm who have 14 new members.
- The Stoneycreek Trophy goes to the institute with the second highest increase in membership. This was awarded to Rhynie who have 11 new members.
- The Retson Family Trophy honours the newest Institute with the most members. This year it goes to Newhaven who have 25 members.

Congratulations to all the trophy winners and many thanks to all our members who help to grow our membership.

6. SWI Annual Report 2024 with Q&A

National President, Mary Burney opened by thanking members for their continued support and highlighted that, despite ongoing challenges, the SWI remains a vital part of Scotland's cultural and social life. The SWI continues to be a vital part of Scotland's social and cultural landscape. From its earliest beginnings, the SWI has focused on empowering women, fostering friendships, learning new skills, and keeping our cultural heritage alive.

Our constitutional aims remain as relevant today as ever:

- Building inclusive and diverse communities
- Advancing education and skills
- Providing a platform for social activities and networking
- Promoting the preservation and development of Scotland's cultural heritage
- And working in partnership with others at home and abroad.

Mary then passed over to Vice President, Susie Finlayson to talk more about the growth and development the SWI has been undergoing.

a. Maintain Organisational Growth and Development

This year marked a key milestone in strengthening the SWI's future:

- The SWI became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), offering greater transparency, reduced trustee liability, and new funding opportunities.
- A new constitution, shaped through legal advice and member consultation, allows more flexibility in Office Bearer roles.
- Membership stabilised at 8,600, but with 26 Institutes closing and only 3 opening, growth remains a concern.
- The SWI Members' Toolkit was launched to help promote the organisation locally.
- Social media presence grew, with Facebook reaching over 10,000 followers and Instagram gaining momentum.

- Sustainability efforts included reducing print materials and increasing online meetings and events.

Susie then passed over to Board Trustee, Clare Greig to talk more about the how members were a key focus of 2024.

b. Prioritise Our Members

Members remained central to all SWI activities in 2024:

- The SWI Summer School returned, with 140 attendees and new payment plans to boost accessibility.
- A wide range of free events and workshops were delivered online and in person.
- Guest speakers included The Hebridean Baker, Sarah Rankin, and the Teddy Bear Ladies.
- National competitions and the Evelyn Baxter Programme continued to thrive.
- Leadership support was offered through Office Bearer gatherings and peer networks.
- Member benefits such as discounts, e-magazines, and community support continued to improve wellbeing and reduce isolation.

Clare then passed over to National Treasurer, May Tosh to talk more about the actions taken to improve financial growth.

c. Achieving Financial Sustainability

The focus this year was on building long-term financial health:

- Office costs were reduced by relocating to an energy-efficient leased space.
- Federation Benefit Fund support was reduced from 100% to 60% and will drop to 30% in 2025.
- The National Membership Fee increased to £30 to reflect rising costs.
- New funding was secured, including £127,175 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £1,500 from the W. M. Mann Foundation.
- Membership stabilisation suggests positive momentum, despite broader demographic challenges.

May lastly passed back over to Vice President, Susie Finlayson to talk about the SWI Heritage Project

d. Implement a Successful SWI Heritage Project

Efforts to protect and celebrate SWI heritage advanced significantly:

- A strategic partnership with The Crichton Trust was announced to develop a Visitor Learning Centre in Dumfries.
- Funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund enabled the hiring of a heritage team for 2024–2026.
- Members helped archive textiles, documents, and stories through hands-on volunteering and events.
- The project included public events, monthly online heritage group meetings, and a wide-reaching member survey to shape the Centre's future.

In summary

2024 was a year of momentum and meaningful progress.

We became a SCIO, updated the constitution gaining stronger governance and access to new funding.

We stabilised the membership decline.

We secured £127,175 in grant funding, reduced costs, and stabilised our finances.

We launched new tools and events to engage members and attract new ones.

And we laid the foundations for a Heritage Centre that will preserve our story and inspire future generations.

Our members continue to show extraordinary passion, skill, and resilience. Together, we are building an inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant future for the SWI—honouring our past while shaping the future.

7. Annual Accounts 2024

May Tosh, National Treasurer, introduced Jacqueline White from Thomson Cooper, SWI's auditor, to present the SWI audited financial statement for the year ended 31st December 2024.

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Jacqueline reported that the accounts reflected a drop in income compared to the previous year, primarily due to the one-off property sale in 2023. Expenditure had remained stable, supported by ongoing cost-saving measures. The year concluded with a net surplus of £11,000, which included gains from investments. It was confirmed that the organisation's reserves remain healthy and that a clean audit opinion had been issued.

National President, Mary Burney requested the adoption of the accounts. These were adopted by National Treasurer, May Tosh and seconded by Sybil Stuart.

National Treasurer, May Tosh thanked Jacqueline for her time. May also officially announced that the Board of Trustees approved a change in the National Fee from £30 to £33 payable in November 2026. This change is necessary to keep pace with rising costs.

8. Membership Discussion Panel

The membership panel session was chaired by Trustee, Karen Johnson and comprised of members from 3 Institutes across Scotland, and the Membership Development Manager from the National Federation of Women's Institutes. The panel comprised of:

- Lorraine Chapman, Cousland SWI
- Gwen Foster, West Lothian Federation
- Jane Muirhead, Lanarkshire Federation
- Juliet Isherwood, NWF

Each panel member gave a five-minute presentation about their Institute/Federation's successes efforts in turning challenges into opportunities, membership growth and setting up new groups. Juliet gave a brief overview of virtual Institutes across England and Wales, highlighting accessibility and flexibility benefits of having these online groups.

9. Heritage Project Update

Diane Cooper, CEO, provided an update on the SWI Heritage Project, outlining progress made since its funding announcement in Dec 2024.

The Heritage Group continues to meet monthly, with members actively engaged in exploring long-term sustainability for SWI's historical assets. The project has been widely promoted across the organisation through events, posters shared with all 28 Federations, and features in newsletters and digital communications.

A major milestone was the digitisation of the first twenty years of Scottish Home and Country magazine, completed in partnership with Automated Document Services Ltd. Training is now underway to support volunteer-led cataloguing efforts, with further digitisation of print materials and manuscripts scheduled through to late 2025.

Training has also begun in collecting oral histories, with initial volunteers trained in ethical recording and data protection practices. These volunteers are now equipped to deliver training locally and expand the programme.

Three intergenerational workshops have been delivered in collaboration with the Young Women's Movement and other partners, including sessions on pyrography, needle-felting, and a crafts-based tea party tied to the Royal Society of Edinburgh's 'Curious' Festival. Additional workshops are planned, including those involving the Young Farmers.

A new SWI website is also in development, with Creatomatic appointed as the design agency. The website will showcase the digital archive and oral histories and is expected to launch in summer 2025.

The project remains largely on schedule, with positive feedback from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Strong partnerships and ongoing outreach continue to increase engagement and visibility across the membership.

10. Vote of thanks and Close of Business

National President, Mary Burney, expressed her thanks for volunteer members Maz and Kath who helped to facilitate the meeting, fellow Trustees, members, and an excellent staff team were also thanked for their friendship, help and guidance.