Welcome to Heritage News - Summer 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**

Scottish Women's Institutes is a SCIO, SC053058

Heritage project update for members

The Project has been very busy since the last Newsletter and over the last eighteen months! We are hugely grateful to you for the 3738 volunteer hours you have contributed to date. This is over 1000 hours more than we promised our funders.

Members of 102 Institutes and 24 Federations have now participated in the Heritage Project. Your work has allowed us to make significant achievements. Thanks to those of you who responded to our call for information about banners, tablecloths and trophies you hold. All this is greatly appreciated.

We're excited to share some project highlights throughout this edition capturing our digital archiving, oral history and skills workshops.

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If you live in a village, it's good to be involved in a village!

The SWI Heritage Manager helped Ishbel Murdoch find a home for a remarkable family collection.

Ishbel's late mother, Elspeth Murdoch, was born in 1927 in what was then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), and was the great-granddaughter of David Livingstone.

Raised in Carnoustie, she joined SWI in 1959 after moving to Buchlyvie, going on to become a long-standing member and office bearer of Buchlyvie Institute.

Ishbel has donated her mother's photographs, programmes and papers, including her Chairman's badge, to the Smith Art Gallery and Museum in Stirling, where curator Aoife Mckenna welcomed the collection.

As Ishbel put it: "If you live in a village, it's good to be involved in a village."

Member meetings: Planning our 110th anniversary

In 2027, the SWI will celebrate 110 years, and we want members to be part of planning how we mark this fantastic milestone.

Join fellow members for a relaxed two-hour ideas session over a cup of tea. It's a chance to chat, share your thoughts and help shape celebrations that reflect everything we love about SWI; friendship, community and making a difference.

- We're holding five workshops around the country, so choose the location that's easiest for you and click to book your free place.
- Edinburgh (McDonald Road Library) – Saturday 15th August at 12:30pm
- Stirling (Raploch Campus) – Saturday 22nd August at 10am
- Aberdeen (Garioch Heritage Centre)- Friday 2nd October at 1pm
- Stewartry of Kirkcudbright (Castle Douglas Church Hall) – Saturday 19th September at 1pm
- Ross-shire & Sutherland (Masonic Lodge) – Saturday 14th November at 2pm
- Highlands & Islands - more information to come soon…
- Roxburghshire - more information to come soon…

If you can't attend, but want to give us your ideas, please click the button below.
We'd love to hear your ideas for our 110th anniversary (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M9DTSBP)

New heritage pages are on the way

Work has begun on upgrading and expanding upon the webpages available on the SWI website. The upgrade plans to provide snippets from oral histories, volunteer testimonies, a past presidents timeline and more. The work on these pages has just begun so we don't have too much to share the moment, but be sure to keep an eye out in the coming months as we begin to unveil the upgrades.

SWI Member Story: Mary Wilson

The pages of 'Home and Country' magazine are jam packed with details of talks, demonstrations and classes mostly delivered by members who have generously given their time, shared their knowledge and skills and provided an extraordinary programme of learning for women in communities across the country.

Recently, volunteer oral historians Maz Thorn and Evelyn Scobie interviewed fellow member Mary Wilson about her involvement in the SWI and the contribution she has made to our educational activities.

member of the Powmill Institute for 57 years, Mary is a skilled craftswoman who ran her own curtain making business. She is also a qualified SWI Judge. Over the years Mary has given numerous talks and demonstrations on food hygiene and cookery, gardening and dressmaking as well as her passion for raising poultry and show birds.

As Evelyn and Maz discovered, Mary also has a great sense of fun and knows a thing or two about making her presentations engaging and memorable. Mary recounts: 'It was billed as "An Evening with Elvis". I took the cockerel, who was a Blue Cochin. The cochins have feathery feet and he was a very large cockerel and nobody knew just quite what was coming. So we had the music playing, "Blue Suede Shoes", and we opened the box and out came Elvis!'

Times have certainly changed but one thing that hasn't changed is the dedication of our volunteer speakers, demonstrators and tutors who just like Mary Wilson do so much to make learning in the SWI such an enlightening and enjoyable experience.

Building our digital archive

Digitising and cataloguing our archives has been a huge, and valuable task. Members have been cataloguing the collection either working on site at the Ballast Trust, or from home, using digitised records. We now have digitised copies of:

- A complete set of Home and Country magazine from 1924 to 2015
- Volumes of the SWRI Cookery Book dating from 1923 to 1952
- Textiles' materials, including books, patterns and photographs
- Samples from J.P. Coats' Needlework Development Scheme (1934 – 1961)
- LPs, slides and script, professionally recorded for the SWRI in the 1970s.

There is still plenty of important work to be done to continue archiving the rich and storied history of the SWI, if you'd like to get involved as a volunteer please reach out to the SWI Heritage Volunteer Coordinator: Elizabeth.bryan@theswi.org.uk

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Keeping member voices alive

Last year we held training sessions in ethical recording, held in Dumfries, Perth, Muir of Ord, Edinburgh and online. Further to this, members have been actively recording, sometimes in teams of two. Our member interviewees, aged between 45 and 102, have:

- 90 recorded interviews ranging between 20 minutes and two hours in length.
- 10 podcasts available for listening on our website
- A full set of transcripts for these recordings, created by a combination of AI transcription and member editing and correcting.
- A detailed recording log, with synopses and key interview themes included.

Keep an eye on the SWI website in the future as we'll begin to upload snippets from our oral history recordings giving members a front row seat to our history.

A piece of SWI Embroidery History

Many of us remember Catherine Blair's embroidered panel, 'Descriptive Panel of the W.R.I. from Cradle to Majority,'from the meeting room in Heriot Row. In April, Sophie Younger of Younger Conservation visited our Edinburgh offices to assess its condition and advise on its future care, thankfully, in very good shape for a piece nearing 90 years old. We're grateful to John of Framework Picture Framers in Edinburgh, who helped us secure the glass with expert advice and materials, free of charge. We're looking forward to uncovering more about the panel's history, stitches and design.

Clò Kit - inspiring the next generation

Clò Kit is an innovation project led by Dr Aude Campbell Le Guennec, Design Anthropologist at the Glasgow School of Art, in collaboration with Laetitia Barbu, design researcher (Ark-Ellia Design), and Anne-Charlotte Hartmann-Bragard, cultural heritage and textile education consultant, founder of Studio Abi.

Supported by the Creative and Social Futures Fund at the University of Glasgow, with matched funding from the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the project develops innovative learning tools and services that help museums and heritage organisations create engaging, inclusive educational experiences for children.

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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 next three dates are:
Thursday 30 July 2026, 6 pm – 7 pm
Thursday 27 August, 6 pm – 7 pm
Thursday 24 September, 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 12 August 2026, 12 pm – 1 pm
Wednesday 9 September 12 pm – 1 pm

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

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A word from our friends

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

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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.

Member FAQs
Our new FAQs page has answers for the most common, membership, events and governance questions

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 for updates.

Contact us for any further information at SWI, Unit 8, 1 Carmichael Place, Edinburgh EH6 5PH or 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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