Valentina Bold I'm Valentina Bold and I'm talking today with Dame Barbara Kelly and I'm very grateful to you for doing this. When you first joined the Rural, how [was it] you got involved?

Dame Barbara Kelly I was born and bred in a place called Dalbeattie which is in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. But when I was in my early teens I was learning to play the cello and the local county music director, he invited me to be part of a string music group. We were invited to come to Shawhead WRI one evening to play to the people and we were so warmly welcomed. It was in the village hall at Shawhead.

One of the things that they did at the end of our concert was to thank us and give us tea. I've never forgotten, it was such a beautiful tea! [laughing]. The egg sponge was really excellent! And afterwards talking to people they said, “well, you didn't need to think about that because any Rural would have given you an excellent tea!”

Later, I fell madly in love with a guy who was a local farmer. But my mother-in-law, she was much involved it turned out, at Shawhead WRI. Not only was she President of the Institute, she ended up being Chairman of the Federation and she became a National Councillor as well. So when I was about to come and live here with Kenneth, she invited me to come for tea one day and she had invited lots of the Rural Institute members to come and meet me. So, again that was another lovely friendly evening, but I knew that the message was that when I got married and came to live, I was going to join the Rural. [laughing]

The Institute was great. Not only did I learn a lot about their passion for the crafts, one of the things that it helped me was that they showed me how to run a committee.

So I learned about the Chairman's skills, I learned about taking minutes, accounting, setting up programme syllabuses and all of that. I realise now that was very important to me that I got those skills handed on to me from day one, from the local Institute. Very rapidly I became chairman of Shawhead WI and then that meant that I went to the Federation Committee as Federation Chairman. I ended up being, going to the National Council meetings as well. So I was in it up to my ears from the moment I played the cello! [laughing]

It just made me realise today how vitally important the Rural was in my whole career because of the encouragement they gave me and the fact that I became frequently Chairman of things that I hadn't planned to be involved in. For instance, I got to a point where I did become Vice President of the Rural, and that meant that I was encouraged to go off and visit every Federation around Scotland. So that was everything from Muckle Flugga to the Mull of Galloway, that's one of my favourite sayings.

When I was Vice President, I worked closely with the National Secretary who -- that was a paid job. Because then I was tapped on the shoulder by the Scottish Office who said to me would I be interested in going to the Scottish Consumer Council, and I ended up being Chairman. They asked me if I would become a member of the Equal Opportunities Commission and I ended up as the Scottish Commissioner of the EOC [laughing]. And the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award: I was invited to be part of that and I became Chairman of Scotland for that. And that was entirely as a consequence of the fact that the Rural had obviously given them my name.