Heritage News
Autumn 2026

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

Celebrating our heritage - and everyone who has helped!

We're delighted to share that the independent evaluation of our Heritage Lottery Project is now complete. Prepared by Academy Street Consulting in Dumfries, the report celebrates just how much we have achieved together over the past two years.

There is plenty to be proud of:

- We exceeded all our targets, despite some significant challenges along the way.
- Our training, skills workshops and partnership events were a great success.
- Volunteers gave more than 3,500 hours of their time.
- Volunteers catalogued a substantial part of our treasured archives, including a complete set of Scottish Home and Country magazines, cookery items and textiles.
- Around 90 oral history recordings captured members' memories and stories from across Scotland.

A heartfelt thank you to every member, volunteer, staff member and partner who helped make this possible. Your time, enthusiasm and knowledge are helping to preserve SWI's story for future generations, and giving us a wonderful foundation for next year's 110th anniversary celebrations!

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Looking ahead to the SWI 110th Anniversary

With our 110th anniversary coming up next year, it's been lovely to hear members' enthusiasm and ideas for celebrating this special milestone together.
Our brainstorming meetings across Federation areas are nearly complete, and suggestions have ranged from a new national cookbook featuring 110 recipes to Institutes carrying out 110 acts of kindness. Thank you to everyone who has shared their thoughts - there is plenty to inspire us!

We are bringing these ideas together for an Anniversary Working Group, made up of 11 members from the Heritage Steering Group. They will meet monthly and work alongside the Board and staff to help coordinate a programme that members across Scotland can enjoy and take part in.

The group's first meeting is on 19 November, and we'll share an update with members soon afterwards.

We know many Institutes are keen to get started, and we warmly welcome that enthusiasm. For now, please keep gathering ideas, but hold off on firm commitments until we have shared the overall plan. This will help us coordinate dates, resources and opportunities, while leaving room for the local celebrations that make SWI so special.

Thank you for your patience and support. Together, we can make this a memorable anniversary that celebrates our history, our friendships and our future.

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Pilot series of Oral history Recordings now available

Heritage Project Oral Historians are paramount in preserving the voices of Scottish Rural Women for generations to come.

Recorded interviews typically range between 20 minutes and two hours in length, regaling fascinating stories from our institutes across Scotland. We have 3 short snippets from our oral history recordings that we are delighted to share with SWI Members as part of a pilot as we look to expand the heritage project content available to SWI members. Listen to the recordings on the SWI Website.

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Sharing skills with the next generation

Our current Heritage Project comes to an end in mid-January, but we hope this will be the beginning of another exciting chapter. We have submitted an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a follow-up project, Scotland's Big Skill Share.

Subject to funding, the two year project would run from January 2027 to December 2029, helping us celebrate our 110th anniversary and share the skills, traditions, stories and knowledge that SWI members have passed down through generations.

Through a travelling pop-up exhibition and hands-on workshops, we hope to bring members and local communities together, welcoming people of all ages to discover our heritage, try a skill and learn from one another.

Members' knowledge and enthusiasm are at the heart of these plans. Thank you to everyone who has contributed so far, you are helping to keep our heritage alive and inspire others to carry it forward.

We'll share news with members as soon as we receive a decision on our funding application.

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SWI Supports the Queen Elizabeth II Digital Archive

In September the cabinet office reached out to Scottish Women's Institutes to be a part of a special project designed to celebrate and commemorate the life of Queen Elizabeth II through a digital archive.

While searching our collection for items to contribute, we came across a special find in the 1953 edition of Scottish Home and Country magazine. Written by Mrs Lamb, a member of Crathie Institute and wife of Rev John Lamb of Crathie Kirk, "Happy Memories of Our Queen" shares her personal memories of the young Queen's girlhood on Royal Deeside.

One of our trained member volunteers, Ann McGhee from Ross-shire and Sutherland Federation, has brought the article to life again by recording Mrs Lamb's words. More than 70 years after it was first published, this wonderful piece of SWI history can now be heard.

These memories form part of a much wider story held within the SWI archive, reflecting our members' connections with the Royal Family and communities across Scotland through generations.

As we approach our 110th anniversary, we look forward to sharing more discoveries from our archives and celebrating the people, places and stories that have shaped the SWI since 1917.

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Discovering SWI's Royal Connections

As we explore SWI's links with the Royal Family, we have a lovely opportunity to take a closer look at the letters, gifts, photographs and other royal memorabilia held in our archives. Cataloguing these items will help us understand their stories and make them easier to find and share with members.

Eight volunteers stepped forward at our online Heritage Group meetings to help with this collection. Their first cataloguing day will take place at the Edinburgh office in early November, a warm thank you to everyone taking part!

We hope there will be more opportunities for members to get involved, both in person and possibly online. If this sparks your interest, please look out for further updates, we'd love more members to help uncover this part of SWI's history. Please email valentina.bold@theswi.org.uk if this is of interest.

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Member donation - Muriel Easson collection

Our sincere thanks to Elizabeth Robb who donated a beautiful collection of SWRI jewellery and badges which belonged to her mother Muriel Easson (1919 – 1990). Muriel Easson was a member of Maryburgh, Invergordon and Drumgeith Institutes, across two Federations (Ross-shire and Sutherland Federation; Angus Federation). Elizabeth talked to Valentina, during the Gathering, about her mother's long and happy life with the SWI.

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Heritage recipe makes its way to end of harvest celebration

Heritage Project Manager Valentina has been asked to deliver the keynote speech at Historic Environment Scotland's Community Heritage Conversations 2026, on the 26th November. In "If you know a good thing, pass it on": Strong Scottish Women and the SW(R)I" Valentina will share key achievements from the Heritage Project, and our plans for 2027. Tickets are free, available both for in person and online attendance.

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Historic Environment Scotland - Keynote Speech

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Dates for your diary

Online heritage group

The Heritage group meets 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 date is:
Thursday 26 November 2026, 6pm - 7pm

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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

LEARN MORE at https://www.youngwomenscot.org/our-programmes/young-women-remember/

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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Member extras

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

It's important to ensure that any event involving members, non-members (adults or children) is properly branded with our legal name - SWI (not SWRI), and it is recommended to confirm that any event venue you use has their own public liability insurance.

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

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.

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