

The Village Series



Jam Preservation Centre Tharston

A transcript of the minutes of
Tharston's Jam Preservation Centre

Nigel Peacock

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Introduction:

The Women's Institute movement in Britain started in 1915. It was formed during The Great War to encourage countrywomen to get together and become involved in growing and preserving food to help to increase the supply of food to the war-torn, hungry nation, when submarine blockades prevented food from being brought into the country. The Second World War was one of the WI's finest hours, if not its finest. Its previous history of over 20 years of education, entertainment and supporting women and campaigning for their rights, gave rise to the enormous responsibility felt by the members to 'do their bit' for Britain. With all the vigour, energy and enthusiasm at their disposal, over three hundred thousand country women set out to make their lives and the lives of those around them more bearable in what was described as 'a period of insanity'. The big pictures of heroism and bravery were fashionable and exciting, but it was the behind-the-scenes 'nitty-gritty' approach to the daily problems presented by the war that were at the heart of what the W.I. did to make a difference. Making jam, making do and mending, gathering rosehips and other wild berries, keeping pigs, goats and rabbits, housing evacuees, setting up canteens for the troops, knitting, singing and campaigning for a better Britain after the war: all these activities played a crucial role in war time, instrumental in keeping spirits up and providing some niceties in a time of austerity.

A Jam and Preserving Group was a common activity in many villages, and Tharston was no exception. At this time there was no Women's Institute in Tharston, it started in 1966, so it is assumed that this was a village initiative but using the knowledge, guidance and enthusiasm of the W.I.

The extract below¹ is copied from the WI's website² which they hopefully will not object to being reproduced (permission is being sought). It gives good background to the formation of the Jam Groups even though it may not be completely connected to the Tharston Group.

Jam and the WI during the Second World War

"In the autumn of 1939 Lady Denman had promised the WIs news of the important part that they were to play in the production and preservation of the country's food.

With up to two thirds of Britain's food being imported, the government realised that they had to find ways of producing more food at home. Bottling and preserving surplus fruit and vegetables was something that countrywomen had always done. NFWI³ already gave considerable emphasis to practical cookery and there were trained Instructresses of Home

¹ Website: <https://www.thewi.org.uk/centenary/the-history-of-the-wi/jam-and-the-wi-during-the-second-world-war>

² Website: <https://www.thewi.org.uk/>

³ Abbr: Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes

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Economy already at work in the Federations. In early 1938 the Ministry of Agriculture had given NFWI an initial grant of £500 to set up a Produce Guild to teach members about intensive cultivation and to supply fertilisers and plants more cheaply.



The grant allowed an Organiser to be employed to travel round the country running courses and giving advice. WI members were ready not only to grow more produce but also to start the co-operative enterprises for which they are probably best known – jam making, bottling and canning. The grant from the Ministry was increased, and by 1944 NFWI received £2,100 for national work and £4,000 for work in the County Federations.

The Government grant allowed NFWI to buy £1,400 worth of sugar in 1940 and distribute it round the Federations who in turn issued it to those WIs prepared to take part in the Co-operative Fruit Preservation Scheme. As a result 1,631 tons of preserves were made that year. Federations bought canning machines to loan to Institutes, and the Americans, through the Associated Countrywomen of the World, sent 500 Dixie Hand sealers (home canners) along with a complete Food Preservation Unit and oil stoves, preserving pans, tea towels, thermometers, jam jars, bottling jars, jam pot covers and special discs for pickles and chutneys.



The work was done in 'WI preservation centres', there were over 5,000 of these, located in private houses, farm kitchens, outbuildings, village halls or school kitchens. The centres

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only dealt with fruit which could not be used by its growers or transported to a jam factory and so was in danger of going to waste. There was no remuneration other than to cover running costs. After 1941, when rationing started, the scheme came directly under the Ministry of Food. Members then sold their fruit to the centre for a fixed government price, but the women worked voluntarily in the centre. The helpers were not allowed to buy anything for themselves, Ministry Inspectors visited the centres and all the jars and cans were collected and taken to central wholesale depots.

Between 1940 and 1945 over 5,300 tons of fruit was preserved in this way and Sir Henry French, permanent secretary to the Ministry of Food, told a conference of 300 delegates from WI Preservation centres, that the output of the last four years had been the equivalent to a year's jam ration for more than half a million people in this country.



This information has been taken from a paper delivered to The Second International Conference on the History of Voluntary Action, held at Roehampton Institute, University of Surrey, 9 -11 September 2003 by WI member Anne Stamper. The full paper with all references can be seen here⁴.”

⁴ Website: https://www.thewi.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/11111/countrywomen-in-war-time-womens-institutes-1938-1945-.pdf

Individual minutes entries:

April 4th 1941

Tharston Preservation Centre

A meeting was held at the Vicarage on April 4th 1941 to decide whether a Jam Preservation Centre could be put into operation during the fruit season. Thirteen people were present.

Miss Gates representing the Federation of Women's Institutes gave an interesting talk on the subject, giving details of organising the scheme on a business footing.

At the conclusion of her talk it was decided unanimously on the proposition of Miss Clegg and seconded Smithson to form a Jam Preservation Centre in the Parish.

Miss Clegg was unanimously elected Chairman on the proposition of Mrs Dye and seconded by Mrs. Button. This was carried unanimously. Mrs. Duffield was elected secretary on the proposition of Mrs. Palmer and seconded by Mrs. Dye, and carried unanimously. Mrs. Smithson was elected Treasurer being proposed by Miss Clegg and seconded by Mrs. Duffield. Carried unanimously. Mrs. Barnes was proposed chief jam maker by Miss Clegg and seconded by Mrs. Dye. This proposal was unanimously carried. It was proposed by Mrs. Dye and seconded by Mrs. Gowing that Mrs. Button be responsible for labelling the jam.

Following an offer by Mrs. Crisp for the Centre to be at the Hall, it was unanimously agreed that this offer be accepted.

On the proposition of Miss Clegg and seconded by Mrs. Crisp it was decided to apply for a loan of £10 and for a permit for 6cwts of sugar to be supplied by Mr. F.W. Woolsey of Long Stratton.

At the conclusion of the meeting a Vote of Thanks was passed thanking Miss Gates for her instructive talk.

Mary G. Clegg (Chairman) April 4th 1941

April 30th 1941

A meeting was held on April 30th 1941.

A letter received from the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes regarding details of Loans, Grants and Equipment was read by the Secretary.

It was proposed by Mrs. Barnes, seconded by Mrs. Duffield and carried unanimously that everyone in the Parish should be asked individually if they were willing to help. Each member of the Committee undertook to visit the houses in their district.

A list was drawn up of various items of equipment which could not be borrowed and it was decided that the Secretary and Treasurer should buy these.

Mary G. Clegg. April 30th 1941

26th May 1941

A meeting was held on May 26th 1941.

The Secretary reported that the Loan of £10 had been received. A leaflet was also read regarding the distribution of the jam. Regret was generally expressed that no jam was to be made available to members of the Centre in recognition of their services.

The Committee reported that as a result of their visits in the Parish, many jars are available, some people were willing to help but the prospects of fruit did not seem good.

Mary G. Clegg. May 26th 1941

June 9th 1941

A meeting was held on Monday June 9th 1941.

It was proposed by Miss Clegg and seconded by Mrs. Button that Mrs. Barnes be appointed the third signatory for the Banking Account. Carried unanimously.

It was decided to have another meeting before starting the Jam Making.

June 28th 1941

A meeting was held on Saturday June 28th 1941.

It was decided to start making Gooseberry Jam on the following Tuesday.

It was proposed by Mrs. Barnes and seconded by Miss Clegg that Mr. Button should be asked to supply 10 Gals. of oil, and that a Permit should be applied for.

Mary G. Clegg

November 27th 1941

The final meeting for the Centre's year was held on Thursday Nov: 27th. 1941.

Those present were Miss Clegg, Chairman, Mesdames Button, Duffield, Gowing and Smithson.

The accounts for the year were presented and passed. The Bank Statement showed a balance of £16 . 13 . 11. It was proposed by Miss Clegg & seconded by Mrs. Button that the £10 loan should be repaid immediately. Carried unanimously.

It was proposed by Miss Clegg and seconded by Mrs. Duffield that £1 should be sent to the Federation of Women's Institutes as the Centre's contribution towards expenses. Carried unanimously.

It was agreed that the remaining £5 . 13 . 11 should remain in the Bank until the next Jam season.

A unanimous vote of thanks was given to Miss Clegg on the proposition of Mrs. Button, seconded by Mrs. Gowing.

M. Clegg

1942

A meeting was held at the Vicarage on 1942 to elect a Committee for the coming season.

The following persons were present:-

Jam Preservation Centre

Miss Clegg, Chairman, & Mesdames, Blake, Button, Duffield, Durrant, Rainger & Smithson.

The Committee were re-elected viz: Miss Clegg Chairman, Mrs. Duffield, Secretary, Mrs. Smithson Treasurer, Mrs. Button to tie down & label, Mrs. Durrant chief-boiler, Mrs. Gowing, Disher-up.

It was decided to ask Mrs. Dye if she would be willing to lend her tables as before and members of the committee offered to lend primus stoves etc.

It was proposed that the Secretary apply for a permit for 2 cwt sugar to be bought from Mr. Ludkin of Hapton. Also to apply for a permit for 10 gals. Of Paraffin to be bought from Mr. T. W. Button.

It was proposed by Miss Clegg & seconded by Mrs. Smithson & carried unanimously that the Centre should make pickles this year as these could be sold amongst members of the Centre.

It was also proposed that the Secretary obtain a catalogue from Messrs. G. Fowler Lee of Reading to ascertain prices of 2 pint measure, thermometer, preserving pans & Jam pot filler.

Mrs. Crisp kindly offered to lend her delightful room as before.

M. Clegg Aug: 19th 1942

August 19th 1942

A meeting was held at the Vicarage on Aug 19th 1942, to decide from whom the sugar should be bought.

The following persons were present, Miss Clegg Chairman & Mesdames Button, Duffield, Durrant & Gowing.

The Secretary stated that all jam made up to date had been sold the majority having been bought by the C.W.S.

It was proposed by Mrs. Duffield & seconded by Miss Clegg that a further 2 cwt. of sugar should be bought from Mrs. Stimpson carried unanimously.

Jam Preservation Centre

It was proposed by Mrs. Button & seconded by Miss Clegg that in the event of the Jam Centre continuing next year that the Co-operative Society should be given the first order for sugar, difficulties of transport being the reason for not doing so this year. Carried unanimously.

M. Clegg. Nov: 5th 1942

November 5th 1942

A meeting was held at the Vicarage on Nov. 5th. 1942 to come to an arrangement concerning the distribution of Pickles & Chutney.

The following persons were present. Miss Clegg, Chairman, Mesdames. Button, Duffield, Durrant, Gowing & Smithson.

A letter was read from the W.I. stating that the Centre had been misinformed concerning the sale of Pickles & Chutney. They could be sold to Centre members only & not to the general public as previously stated.

In view of this decision Miss Clegg proposed & Mrs. Duffield seconded, that the Centre should discontinue making Pickles. Carried unanimously.

It was decided that members of the Committee should visit members in their neighbourhood to find out the quantity of pickles & chutney they required. Also that the Committee should meet the following week to distribute such requirements.

M. Clegg Jan. 12th 1943.

January 12th 1943

The final meeting for the Centre's year was held on Jan: 12th 1943. Those present were Miss Clegg, Chairman, Mesdames Button, Duffield, Durrant, Gowing & Smithson.

The accounts for the year were presented & passed.

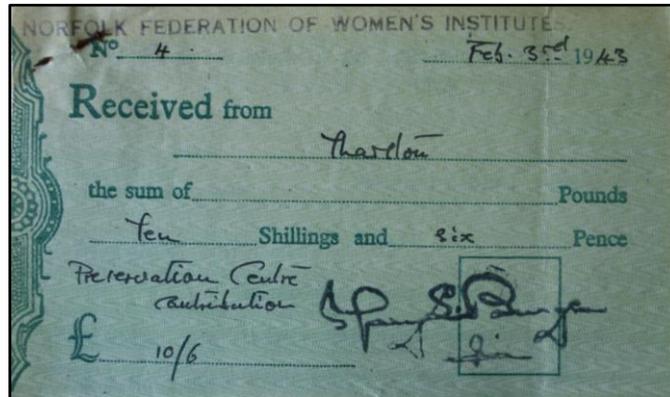
The Bank Statement showed a balance of £21 . 1 . 8.

It was proposed by Mrs. Smithson & seconded by Mrs. Durrant that 10/6 should be sent to the Federation of Women's Institutes as the Centre's contribution towards expenses.

Jam Preservation Centre

Carried unanimously. It was agreed that the remaining balance £20 . 11 . 2 remain in the Bank until the next season.

M. Clegg. April 22nd 1943.



April 22nd 1943

At a meeting held on April 22nd the following persons were present

Miss Clegg, Chairman, Mesdames Button, Durrant, Duffield, Gowing & Smithson.

Miss Clegg informed the meeting that Mrs. Crisp was unable to lend her room for Jam making the coming season. After much discussion it was proposed by Miss Clegg and seconded by Mrs Button that each member see if any room in this part of the village could be hired for the season. Carried unanimously.

Mrs. Duffield said she was unable to continue her duties as secretary but as it seemed unlikely that a room would be found the election of a new secretary was held in abeyance.

At a meeting held on April 22nd the following persons were present
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Mrs. Duffield said she was unable to continue her duties as secretary but as it seemed unlikely that a room would be found the election of a new secretary was held in abeyance.

And so ...:

The April 22nd meeting is the last recorded minutes in the notebook. It is likely that no room was found, and no new secretary appointed, and hence reasonable to assume that the group was disbanded. The unsigned minutes of the last meeting also support this. However, ...



... May 26th, 1944 saw a cheque for £5 sent to the Norfolk War Charities. Was this part of the distribution of funds as part of winding up the group or is there more to this story than the minutes above?

One local resident had this poem in his family collection. The names correspond well to those mentioned in the meeting minutes.

“Plum Jam”

Who’s almost first upon the scene,
Who always looks so neat and clean,
Who never minds the job, how mean.
 Why, Miss Neave.

Who’s the one might be her twin,
Who cleans the jars both out and in,
And never shouts above the din.
 Why, Mrs. Knights.

Who says: “Now girls it’s time for tea”,
Who’s always ready for a spree,
Who whirls around with pot and cup,
Why, don’t you know – Our Disher-up!
 Mrs. Gowing

Who tramps for two long weary miles,
And still arrives face wreathed with smiles,
And arms herself with wooden spoon,
And never leaves her job too soon.
 Why, Mrs. Smithson.

Who’s this now here, so self-possessed,
And starts the job all full of zest,
And quietly smiles at joke and jest.
 Why, Mrs. Durrant.

Who was it made the apple pud,
But stayed much longer than she should,
And found the fire out – the sinner!
But still that pud came out a winner.
 Why, Mrs. Blake.

Who brought the primus to our aid,
Who said “What lots of jam you’ve made”,
Who left that stove till all was done,
And couldn’t stay to see the fun.
 Why, Mrs. Goodwin.

Who’s this arrived so trim and sweet,
With jaunty hat and dainty feet,
Who sticks the labels all complete.
 Why, Mrs. Aldrich.

Who ties the jam so neat and tight,
Whose larder we shall raid one night,
Who thrives on ham – not bread and water,
By hoarding things she didn’t oughter.
 Why, Mrs. Button.

Who write the labels trim and neat,
Who limped around on aching feet,
Arrived home as the clock struck eight,
Whose hubby said “My dear you’re late!”
 Why, Mrs. Duffield.

Who comes last, but not the least,
Who treated us all to a feast,
Who boils the jam, inspects the jars,
Cleans pots and pans, no fun, she mars,
Who never makes us feel she’s boss,
Without her aid we’d be at a loss,
Who calls us all to law and order,
Who does so much we all applaud ‘er,
 Why, Miss Clegg

Anonymous

Notes:

- 1 Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure that the transcriptions are correct, as with all human actions there may well be some differences in interpretation, and not all handwritten text is easily readable.
- 2 The transcription is of the text as it is in the minute book and poem. No attempt has been made to correct spelling, grammar or punctuation.

Observations:

- 1 Most of the names in the minutes are from families well-known in Tharston over several years.
- 2 With guidance from the W.I., a grant of £10 was applied for and agreed, there is no record where this grant was obtained. As it was repaid, who to?
- 3 As there was no W.I. in Tharston until 1966, did any of the named ladies have an association with another local W.I. group or was this just a Christian act started by ladies who knew each other? They were certainly all involved in Church activities, and maybe in some other local organisations like the Red Cross or the Choral Society. A letter in the appendix somewhat confuses this matter - the group sent a donation to the N.F.W.I. but the recipient wanted financial statements!

Data source:

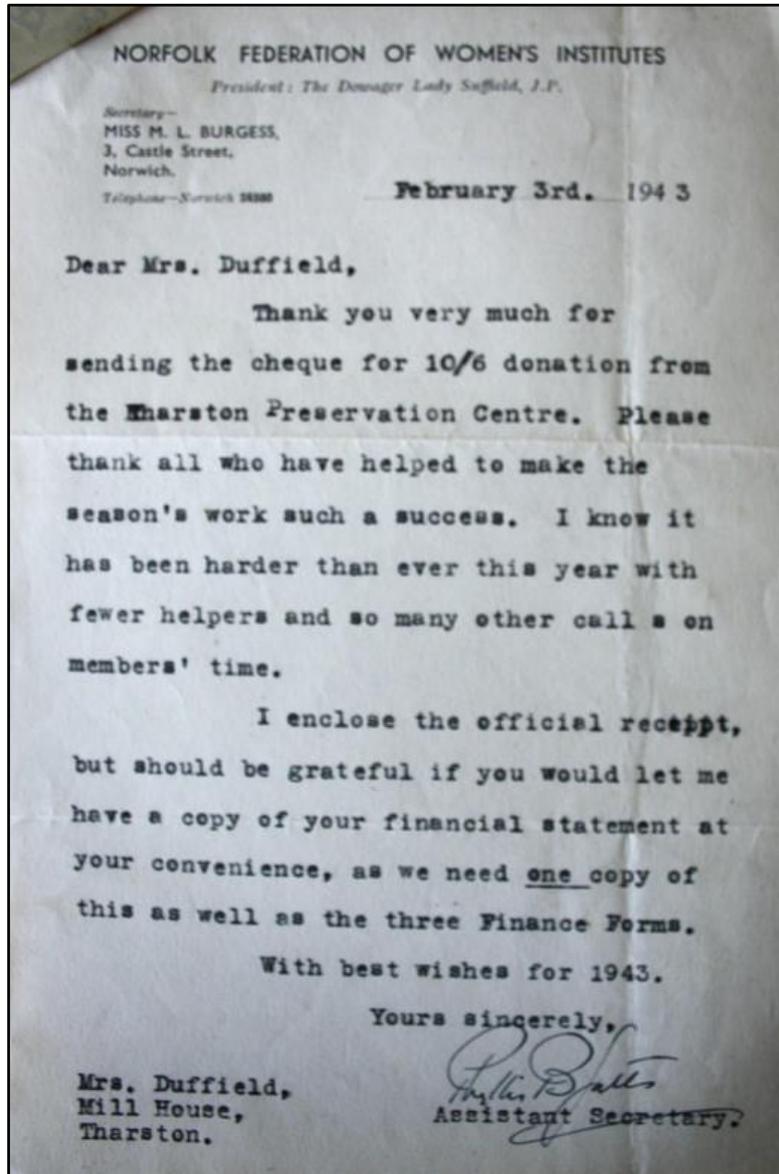
The photographed copies of the original documents from which this information was transcribed was viewed at the Norfolk Archive Centre⁵ and can be referenced in their online catalogue.

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⁵ Website: <http://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/>

Appendix:

For information, a letter dated February 3rd. 1943 from the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes to Mrs. Duffield





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