Introduction  It is appropriate that we follow our topic from last month, Wrecclesham in World War 1, with a session on two Women’s organisations which both had their origins at or about the time of the great World War. One can understand that, left at home to cope on their own, with many of their men folk ‘over there’, these local women should seek companionship and mutual support to say nothing about contributing to the war effort.

It is perhaps a reflection of today’s world, with its perhaps undue emphasis on ‘sexual equality,’ that these gender specific organisations no longer seem to have the same appeal. It is a sad fact that, in Wrecclesham, the two organisations, the Women’s Institute and the Mother’s Union, whose history and activities we are here considering, should both have ceased to meet as they once did. We are fortunate that both have left records of their activities over the past 100 years so that their contribution to life in the village can be recognised. I feel sure that you will enjoy looking through their records, which are brilliantly illustrated with photographs.

The Women Institute.  Although originating in Canada, the Women’s Institute Movement in Britain started in 1915. During the First World War it was formed to encourage countrywomen to get involved in growing and preserving food to help to increase the supply of food to the war-torn nation. The primary intention was to revitalise rural communities and encourage women to become more involved in producing food during the First World War. Since then the organisation’s aims have broadened and the WI is now the largest voluntary women’s organisation in the UK. The WI celebrated its centenary in 2015 and currently has almost 220,000 members in approximately 6,300 W.I.s. The organisation plays a unique role in providing women with educational opportunities and the chance to build new skills, to take part in a wide variety of activities and to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities.

The Wrecclesham Women’s Institute formed in 1919, was the forerunner of the many Institutes in the Farnham area. In 1920 the Surrey Federation of WI’s described its work as follows:

The Women’s Institute movement has made big strides during the last two years.  These Institutes aim at making village life more interesting for the women of the village. They are in no sense political or revolutionary, or subversive of the order of things; but they do try to bring to every woman a knowledge of what citizenship means, and what her responsibilities are. They aim at educating, uplifting, helping women of every class and denomination. Neither doctrinal religion nor party politics may be discussed at a Women’s Institute meetings, because these meetings are for women of every creed, every class, and every party. The Institute stands for unity.

Lectures and demonstrations are given both on domestic and on more educational subjects — fruit-bottling, cookery, dressmaking, basket-making, upholstery. Classes are arranged in a variety of subjects. In Surrey there are 40 Institutes and we should like to see many, many more. The following villages now have institutes in various stages of growth:— Battlebridge, Betchworth, Blackheath, Bletchingley. Little Bookham, Brockham, Brook

**The Second World War 1939-1945**

During World War II the membership of the Wrecclesham Women’s Institute was just over 100 and these ladies raised almost £6,000 towards the war effort – a substantial amount of money for the time. Meetings were held every month and the average attendance was 56.

Scrap Books for recent years will be available at the meeting and give a clear idea of the range of activities that the Wrecclesham Women’s Institute was providing.

**Jam and Jerusalem.**

Women’s Institutes have often been described by this phrase. Home-prepared foods continue to be a staple for the institute. Country Markets Limited is now independent of the WI but its markets were formerly known as "W.I. Markets" and it was previously part of the N.F.W.I. Wrecclesham W.I. itself held a village market for it produce. In 1941 the Institute produced 524lbs of jam and 140 lbs of chutney. In response to an appeal for knitted garments, in that same year, 60 lbs of wool was knitted into socks, scarves, sea boots, helmets and pullovers – 200 in all.

During the 1920s, many W.I.s started choirs Sir Walford Davies was asked to write an arrangement of Hubert Parry's setting of "Jerusalem", for WI choirs. This hymn, with its association with the fight for women's suffrage, was considered appropriate for the emerging WI movement which was encouraging women to take their part in public life, and to improve the conditions of rural life. Leslie suggested that Walford Davies' special arrangement for choir and string orchestra should be performed at the Annual General Meeting of National Federation of Women’s Institutes held in the Queen’s Hall, London in 1924. He conducted the singing, bringing a choir from local WIs with him to lead.

This was so successful that it continues to be sung at the opening of the Federation AGMs, and many WIs open their meetings by singing "Jerusalem", although it has never been adopted as the WI’s official anthem.

**Post War Development**

In 1948 the National Federation of Women’s Institutes bought Marcham Park, in Berkshire, and converted it into short stay residential college called Denman College. Now referred to as Denman, it has grown and developed over the years and is a well-appointed adult education centre attended by approximately 6,000 students each year. It is open to non-members as well as members.

The WI Cookery School at Denman offers a range of over 100 day schools, residential courses and family courses. The courses are tutored by specialists.

In 2010 the organisation celebrated its 95th anniversary and currently has approximately 208,000 members in 7,000 W.Is.
The Wrecclesham Women’s Institute in Recent Times

The W.I. in Wrecclesham continued meeting for many years following World War II. In the 1990’s the name was changed to Farnham Women’s Institute which continued until 2009, when the Farnham Women’s Institute closed. The attached summaries of the Annual Reports in the 1940’s give an indication of the importance that was attached to the work in the village, supporting the armed forces during the Second World War. However after 1990 there was a short break in membership of the National Federation. In October 1992 the Wrecclesham Evening Women’s Institute was formed and was affiliated to the National Federation of W.I.s. Announcing the inaugural meeting in the Parish Magazine it was commented that –

‘A wholehearted effort is to be made to have a W.I. in the village; it has been away from Wrecclesham for too long’

The Annual Reports in the form of a scrap book show that the new Institute was very active at this time. 36 ladies attended the first meeting and a programme of monthly meetings reveal a range of interesting topics. One of the first was on a familiar theme and was reported in the Herald with the Headline:

‘Yes, Wrecclesham Needs a By Pass”

Nearly 20 years later the Herald is this week carrying the same message!

The newly reformed W.I. became well established and following it first year there were around 50 members. A glance through their Scrap Books, which cover the period from 1992 – 2005, show that they held a range of interesting meetings, visits and their activities gave much pleasure and enjoyment. Throughout this period the branch issued its own Newsletter, known as the ‘Hop Vine’, and they were also diligent in reporting their events in both the Farnham Herald and in the Church magazine.

Over these years there was a large and active committee but in the early years of the millennium the individual cost of membership was becoming more and more burdensome. The cost of employing speakers, and particularly the central costs that each member had to contribute for their membership of the W.I., which contributed substantially to the upkeep of its residential Denman College, was leading to a fall in membership and difficulty in obtaining the voluntary help of committee members. In February 2013 it was decided to discontinue membership of the W.I. and to form a more informal group of ladies. The informal group bravely carried on, meeting monthly in the Leverton Hall, but, with numbers still diminishing, in 2016 it was decided to discontinue formal meetings and, although some former members continued meeting for lunch, the W.I. in Wrecclesham, which had been active since the end of World War I, nearly 100 years ago, was discontinued.

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1 W.I. membership today is £39 per person per year of which £19 is retained by the branch, £8.80 will go to the Surrey Federation of W.I’s and £12.50 to the National Federation.
The Wrecclesham Branch of the Mothers’ Union

St Peter’s Church, Wrecclesham, like many Church of England Parishes, has had a Mothers’ Union Branch for many years. Accounts and membership lists survive from 1956 which show that at the outset the membership hovered between 50 and 60 ladies. There is no detailed history of the movement in the village but it was, in its early years, a very active branch which held regular meetings and visits. The Branch would represent the Parish at many events and services held throughout the Diocese. The Branch Register, which we hold in our archives, records the speakers and activities that were organised.

In more recent years it had become a small but focused group which met weekly and attended Holy Communion on Thursday mornings. Like the Women’s Institute they have kept a number of Scrap Books, if perhaps not in such detail as did the W.I. For the past two years it has been less formally organised although many still attend the Thursday morning service. The Scrap Books which will be available at our meeting illustrate some of the activities that they have undertaken. The following information obtained from the Mothers’ Union web site gives an indication of the aims and objectives of the organisation.

**Mothers’ Union is an international Christian membership charity that aims to demonstrate the Christian faith in action through the transformation of communities worldwide.**

We are working with people of all faiths and none in 83 countries to promote stable marriage, family life and the protection of children through praying, enabling and campaigning. We support families and communities both in the UK and around the world. Since 1876, when Mary Sumner first brought together parents in her own parish to build their confidence in bringing up their children in the Christian faith, Mothers’ Union has grown to over 4 million members worldwide. Our members work around the world bringing hope and practical support to millions of people every year through our parenting, literacy and community development programmes and as part of the volunteer base of local churches.

The Mothers’ Union was established in 1876. Its purpose was to encourage parents in caring for their children, not just physically and mentally but also spiritually. From the outset it recognised that strong relationships and the role of family, however defined, are crucial in building healthy communities.

**Our vision** is of a world where God’s love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. This is not a vague hope, but a goal we actively pursue by praying, campaigning and enabling.

**Our mission.** We aim to show our Christian faith by the transformation of communities worldwide. We can do this through the promotion of stable marriage, family life and the protection of children. This is our mission. It is what we aim to achieve.

**Our values.** There are more than four million members of Mothers’ Union today in 83 countries around the world. Each member subscribes to the same values; the moral and ethical codes that are central to the ways in which we operate.
Firstly, we are firmly rooted in a voluntary ethos centred on mutual respect and collaboration.

Secondly, our governance, leadership, and programmes are driven by and undertaken through members within their own communities worldwide.

Thirdly, we work with people of all faiths and none.

**Our aims and objectives are:**

- To promote and support married life
- To encourage parents in their role to develop the faith of their children
- To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service
- To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children
- To help those whose family life has met with adversity

**Our membership.** Our members are not all mothers, or even all women. They are single, married, parents, grandparents, or young adults just beginning to express their social conscience. Mothers' Union provides, for all four million members, a network through which they can serve Christ in their own community - through prayer, financial support and actively working at the grassroots level in programmes that meet local needs.

Mothers’ Union has members in 83 countries across the world. These members seek to serve people in their communities through outreach projects and various programmes. Members work tirelessly, offering Christian care for families, regardless of faith or background.

In the 80+ countries where we currently work there is not one place where there is not enormous pressure of families, on relationships and on community life. Mothers’ Union responds where it can with expertise, credibility and a passion to create positive change. Members give of their time, their expertise and their resources to do all they can to support stable family life in their own communities. Their contribution to community life wherever they live in the world is very much through faith. The 20:20 strategic vision sets out six strategic approaches that we will undertake to significantly increase our impact on the transformation of families and communities worldwide. The approaches seek to underpin our values and our mission.

1. **We will enable individuals, families and communities to be in loving, respectful and flourishing relationships**

2. **We will challenge the mechanisms that perpetuate social injustice adversely affecting family life**

3. **We will increase active, engaged and effective membership**

4. **We will create partnerships within and outside Mothers' Union based on mutuality of relationships**

5. **We will ensure we have sufficient resources to fulfil our mission**

6. **We will evaluate our performance, impact and accountability**