

A year ago, none of us could have imagined the changes that would be imposed on our lives only a few months later. The arrival of Covid-19 has had an impact on all of us – some positive and some negative. As a group we have tried to continue by moving meetings online using the video and internet conferencing facility, Zoom. The introduction of ‘breakout’ rooms following our main speaker has enabled members to talk in smaller groups and many have appreciated this opportunity. Our interest groups have embraced this technology too and many have also been able to continue meeting using the ‘virtual’ platform.

11 committee meetings, including the Annual Trustee meeting, were held during the year; all were quorate.

Five physical member meetings were held November-March with average attendance of 44 members and guests. Six Zoom meetings, from April-October, averaged 33 members. Five guests attended October’s meeting. Overall average attendance is 39. The decrease in member engagement when we moved online is disappointing, but also understandable – some members lacked equipment, others had no interest in participating in a virtual activity. The committee is keen to address the issue of maintaining contact and engagement as we move forward whilst still in a period of uncertainty.

Member meeting programme

Our carefully planned programme for 2020 had to be hastily rescheduled following lockdown in March. Specific thanks must go to Deborah, our Programme Secretary, who worked tirelessly to adapt and reorganise a programme that still satisfied the main aims and purposes of the WI.

Some planned activities/talks were not suitable for presentation via Zoom so have been delayed until 2021 when it is hoped that face to face meetings can be resumed. Those talks that lent themselves to being presented via Zoom continued, although rescheduled ahead of the original date. Thanks go to those members who made suggestions for alternative speakers.

November 2019 – AGM

We said goodbye to three founder members of Ashtead WIng (Treasurer and Joint Presidents) who stepped down after four busy and successful years on the committee. Our ex Joint Presidents looked back over their four years in office and remembered their favourite evenings.

The signed Statement of Accounts and Committee Annual Report were adopted by members. A new committee of 10 members (three remaining members of the committee were joined by seven new members) was voted in with two new Joint Presidents.

We also received a talk about our charity of the year, Ashtead Learning Difficulties Action Group (ALDAG). ALDAG exists to encourage and promote the inclusion of teenagers and young adults with learning difficulties into their local community.

December 2019 – Christmas meeting

Members were welcomed with a glass of mulled wine and then feasted on a delicious buffet prepared by members of the Foodie group. We were entertained by the singing group who led us in a musical interlude of Christmas songs and then given the answers to the Christmas dingbat puzzles which had been distributed as table entertainment.

January 2020 – Antibiotic Research UK (ANTRUK) Charity

Claire Nethersole explained why and how antibiotic resistance occurs and the importance of using antibiotics responsibly, not just in medical practice but farming as well.

February – Skincare techniques and make-up

Clare Pinkney, a professional make-up artist and educator, talked about the importance of a skin care routine and how to protect the skin from harmful sun rays that cause skin cancer. She then demonstrated a naturalistic make-up day look.

AFASIC (Ashtead) was chosen as our charity for 2020. AFASIC seeks to raise awareness and to create better services and provision for children and young people with speech and language impairments.

March – Spies in Surrey

Lorraine Spindler, a local historian, presented an interesting talk about Spies and Trained Assassins in Surrey. Amongst other things, Lorraine told us local scout groups had guarded Leatherhead water treatment works to prevent poison being put in the water and an Epsom Bank Manager had been an MI5 agent in WW2.

A presentation was made to mark the handing over of money raised for ALDAG, our Charity of the Year in 2019. Payment was made to ALDAG in February.

April – Members meeting

This was Wing's first on-line meeting via Zoom. The evening was divided into three sections.

1. A couple of ice breaker games with an opportunity for each member to speak.
2. A relaxation session lead by Esther Nagle from Balance and Breathe
3. Business including an explanation of the 2020 resolutions: A call to increase potential stem cell donor registration and End modern slavery.

May – A Travelling Special (Sight for Surrey)

Callum Russell was our first speaker in the new online Zoom format. Despite a few initial technical difficulties, Callum delivered an interesting talk explaining some of the challenges, risks and highlights he experienced as a blind person travelling solo in South America.

June – Adjust your mindset

Clinical hypnotherapist Nicky Price described her use of Rapid Transformation Therapy to help clients make life changes by freeing them from blocks to change such as acquired patterns of behaviour. Nicky outlined five "Rules of the Mind" that are based on our primal needs and encouraged us to focus on positives rather than negatives; positives have higher energy levels.

July – A change in direction

Jane Shadworth gave a comprehensive talk about her interest in and work on environmental issues. Jane has participated in two Earthwatch Projects, campaigned and fundraised for environmental charities, gained practical skills on volunteering holidays and worked on environmental projects in several countries. She is currently Project Manager for RSPB Scotland's £738,000 Corncrake Calling project.

September – Shared Interest Foundation: Investing in a fairer world

Richard Walker, a volunteer from Shared Interest, explained how Shared Interest tries to alleviate poverty through trade by helping people living in extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day). Shared Interest provides funds or short-term loans to primarily Fair-Trade businesses to help finance equipment, build capacity or by providing credit so that the workers are paid on production rather than having to wait for goods to be sold.

October - Mary, Mary, so contrary. How do y/our biases grow?

The Venerable Dr Rosemarie Mallett, Archdeacon of Croydon explained the importance of recognising unconscious and conscious bias. Biases influence many areas of private and working life including recruitment, mentoring, sponsorship, appraisals and delegation of responsibility. We can all be guilty of unconscious bias and, not controlling it allows society to slip into discrimination. Rosemarie recommended that we should slow down our thinking, avoid making assumptions, keep an open mind, recognise people as individuals and not reinforce negatives.

Activities in the community

1. Poppy display: 1 November-1 December

Our largest poppy display was in place for a month to commemorate all service personnel that had lost lives fighting for our country. Another 900 poppies were attached to new green netting to increase the size of the existing display. The poppies were made using the base and lids of plastic drinks bottles. We are proud that the display featured on NFWI website.



2. Daffodil planting

The winter months were brightened in February when the daffodil bulbs we had planted in October 2019 burst into flower at the entrance to Ashtead recreation ground. In September, six members of the gardening group planted another 130 bulbs on the other side of the driveway to the recreation ground. We look forward to those flowering next spring.



3. VE 75th anniversary banners

20 members used repurposed materials and worked together to design and create several banners to mark VE day on 7 May. The banners were made pre-lockdown and erected on 4 May observing social distancing guidelines.

We were delighted that Surrey News (June) included an article and photographs about the project. WI Life magazine and Surrey Federation published photographs of the banner on their Twitter account and NFWI included it on their Facebook site. It was also included on local social media.



SFWI attended events

- November 2019: Speaker Auditions in Ripley – three committee members.
- February 2020: Secretary and President's workshop in East Horsley – three committee members.
- June 2020: SFWI meeting (via Zoom) – one Joint President
- September 2020: Annual Meetings made easy workshop (via Zoom) – one Joint President.

Interest groups

Our several well-supported interest groups provide members with opportunities to meet like-minded people, learn new skills and make new friends.

Covid restrictions meant the activities of some of these groups had to be curtailed. Others found creative ways to continue using online video platforms.

A review of the year from each interest group is included on the following pages.

Showgirls – Co-ordinator: Jackie Smith

Showgirls had a relatively quiet year this year. Pre-restrictions, several outings were organised:

1. Live screenings at Leatherhead Theatre
 - 42nd Street – 6th December and 12th January
 - Kinky Boots – 6th and 23rd February
2. Theatre visit - Phoenix theatre in London on 24th January to see Come from Away

During restrictions, members were sent an email with links for online shows, ballets, etc.



Walk and Talk – Co-ordinator: Jennifer Green

Before the onset of Covid, monthly walks were organised. When the first 'wave' diminished and restrictions on socialising were lifted, two further walks were organised. All walks were popular and had a good turn-out from members who enjoyed the opportunity to combine exercise and socialising. Sadly, with the recent restrictions on numbers of people congregating, no more walks have been planned.

Book group

Due to popularity we run three different book groups; the three groups do not necessarily read the same books as choices can vary depending on recommendations.

Ashtead Wing Book Group 1

Books read this year:

- The Essex Serpent – Sarah Perry
- The Bone Clocks – David Mitchell
- The Mountain between Us – Charles Martin
- The Confession – Jessie Burton
- Elizabeth is Missing – Emma Healy
- The Quality of Silence – Rosamund Lupton
- Cilka's Journey – Heather Morris

- Number 11 – Jonathan Coe
- No-one Home – Tim Weaver
- The Flat Share – Beth O’Leary
- The Hate U Give – Angie Thomas
- Where the Crawdads Sing – Delia Owens
- My Sister the Serial Kiiller – Oyinkan Braithwaite

Joint favourite books were: ‘Where the Crawdads Sing’ and ‘Elizabeth is Missing’.

Ashtead Wing Book Group 2

The year started with our monthly get togethers in member’s houses. Some of our group attended Literary Laughs, a fund-raising quiz evening for book groups and we had a Christmas curry evening. Once lockdown started, we moved over to Zoom which have been very successful. As well as our monthly book meetings, we have met weekly in smaller numbers for a discussion of a play /film/musical which was chosen the previous week and watched beforehand. As the summer progressed, this became a weekly chat. Book group has been a significant highlight of lockdown and we have really got to know each other. Finally, in September, we managed a socially distanced coffee morning. Unfortunately, this was a one-off event as new rules were imposed, and we have returned to Zoom.

Our members access the books using a variety of mediums. Pre-lockdown, we were getting our books exclusively from the library. Post-lockdown, we have bought the books and audiobooks have also become quite popular. Deborah introduced us to Borrowbox which is a library version of audiobooks.

The book which provoked the longest discussion was The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, inspired by the true story of Henrietta whose cancerous cells have been used in countless experiments without proper consent being given. Much more accessible than it sounds! Our most popular reads were A Gentleman in Moscow and A Place called Winter.

This is the full list of books:

A Gentleman in Moscow - Amor Towles
The Essex Serpent - Sarah Perry
An American Marriage - Tayari Jones
A Place Called Winter - Patrick Gale
Not My Father’s Son - Alan Cummings
Sweet Caress - William Boyd
A Good Enough Mother - Bev Thomas
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks - Rebecca Skloot
A Year of Marvellous Ways - Sarah Winman
The Salt Path - Raynor Winn
Birdsong - Sebastian Faulks

Ashtead Wing Book Group 3

Once lockdown was relaxed, we have met every 5 - 6 weeks, either by Zoom or, if weather and Covid regulations permitted, outside in someone’s garden. Books we have read included The Essex Serpent by Sarah Perry, Becoming by Michelle Obama, The Trouble with Goats and Sheep by Joanna Cannon, The Dry by Jane Harper, The Salt Path by Raynor Winn and most recently A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles.

Foodie – Co-ordinator: Ilario Landino

In November group members brought favourite Christmas dishes to taste. A selection of these were then selected to be prepared for our WI members December Christmas meeting.

We had a great start at the beginning of the year with 2 amazing workshops, where we learnt how to make homemade Pizzoccheri (an Italian traditional recipe) and scones (both traditional and the cheese ones). Then the COVID-19 pandemic started, forcing us to stop the physical meetings. We resumed the activity remotely in April. The first event was another workshop and together we made beetroot crêpes; in May, June and July, we involved members of our Foodie group, asking them to demonstrate how to make their preferred recipe:

- May – Sarah demonstrated how to bake shortbread biscuits decorated with sugar frosted fresh flowers
- June – Cristiana made her Italian Crescioni romagnoli and Jackie some chocolate éclairs
- July – Kate demonstrated how to make Vegetable Spring Rolls and Ann made Welsh cakes

In June we also started a parallel group about sourdough starter and how to make bread. We have had a couple of introduction meetings, but it is a topic that is easier to discuss in-person.

After the summer break, we were ready for the second part of this 2020 and in October a “Cheese tasting” of 5-6 types of unusual, expensive cheese was organised via Zoom. During the meeting, each cheese was opened, tasted and opinions shared.



Wing Arts & Crafts Group - Co-ordinators: Deborah Tuddenham & Diane Riddle

We had 39 WI members sign up to our Arts & Crafts Group, 2 of these members have never attended. We feel fortunate to meet at Ashtead Baptist Church Hall which provides us with the space for members to make and create. However, this year has been challenging with Covid-19 restrictions, so we have had to learn new ways of providing members with craft activities and time to come together. We have used Zoom, invited external demonstrators and collated doorstep collections, which has enabled us to include those members who are unable to join us on Zoom.

November Dorking	The Gin Kitchen A visit to an artisan distillery to learn about the journey of the business, the carefully sourced botanicals and the processes of creating hand-crafted luxury gin.
Church hall	Christmas Tree Decorations A member led session using a variety of material and methods to make tree decorations. Christmas tree decoration packs were also made and the proceeds from this session and sale of packs to members, went to our Charity of the Year.
Church hall	Poppy Display Hands on session adding handmade poppies made from recycled materials displayed annually at Craddock Parade, local shops.
December Church hall	Christmas Wreath Making We welcomed a local florist to demonstrate and teach us how to create a Christmas Wreath using fresh foliage from members' gardens, seasonal cones and ornamental decorations.
Polesden Lacy	Glass Snowflake with Abinger Stained Glass A workshop to create a glass snowflake using techniques used in making stained glass windows. Beautiful decorative addition to a window for Christmas.
January Church hall	Planning session Following a comprehensive survey that was sent out to members, we met to set the diary for the year. Members had the opportunity to make suggestions on crafts they would like to try and to offer their talents to share with the group and lead a session.
February Church hall	Embroidery A talk and embroidery session by Sophie Long. A graduate from The Royal School of Needlework in 2008. In 2011 Sophie was invited to be a part of the team who worked on Kate Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge's wedding dress. A popular activity.
March Last meeting at the Church hall.	VE 75 Day Display WIng Community Display at Craddock's Parade commemorating VE day and WI involvement during WWII.
April Facebook	Show & Tell An opportunity for members to post and show what they have been making, short or long-term projects.
May Zoom	Graham Shaw (Tedx) – Who thinks they can't draw? Cartoon doodling A personalised video introduction from Graham and supplied resources & video workshop. Surprisingly, more of us realised we could draw than first thought and enjoyed learning how to do cartoon characters.
June Zoom	Paper Flowers - Origami & blossom flowers. Resources collated by the group co-ordinators, collected from doorsteps. Instructions beautifully illustrated enabled those who could not join the Zoom meeting to be involved and create at home. Photos of the beautiful blooms were shared on our Facebook group.
July Zoom	Quilling – Member led session Liz demonstrated the basic shapes needed and members then went into break-out rooms to quill & chat. The instructions, prepared by Liz, were emailed out to members in advance so those who could not attend could still create and upload photos to our Facebook page. So many different & individual variations on a theme. A popular activity.
August Zoom	Coffee & Catch Up – Knit & Natter, Crochet & Chat etc An opportunity for members to join for a social chat in break-out rooms, bringing along their own craft and refreshments.
September Zoom	Pompom Charms Resources & instructions collated by Deborah, group co-ordinator, and collected from doorsteps. This enabled those who could not join the Zoom meeting to be involved and create at home, a choice of Owl, Penguin or Lovebirds.
October Zoom	Quirky Paint Along An external Zoom demonstrator who guided us through painting Quirky Birds in watercolours. Great opportunity to bring this activity to our members which we would have been unable to do, had we been in the Church hall.

Wing Arts & Crafts Activities - 1st November 2019 to 31st October 2020



Gardening – Co-ordinator: Janet Bickford

Following a successful planning session in January, the gardening group started the year with ideas for a plant sale and agreed dates for a workshop and a monthly visit to a local garden or show. Sadly, Covid restrictions have prevented many of these from happening, but we hope to rekindle many of the ideas next year.

In February, we did manage:

1. A visit to RHS Wisley to see the ‘Great Houseplant takeover’ in the glass house.
2. A Harlequin living willow tree weaving workshop.



Although we were unable to plan a proper plant sale, in May, one of our members provided cuttings she had nurtured from plants in her garden and these were advertised for sale by email to members of the gardening group. Over £120 was raised and the proceeds will be split between WIng and our charity of the year. We hope to hold a proper plant sale at one of our member meetings in 2021.

During restrictions, members were sent an email with links for virtual visits to Kew, RHS Wisley, National Garden Scheme gardens and National Trust gardening tips.

The easing of social distancing measures allowed a small group to visit RHS Wisley in September and one group of six and one group of five visited Painshill Park on separate days in October.

