

# Holt WI

Flaming June? Well this year it might just be.

Last month we were looking forward to our annual coffee morning, which has been blighted in previous years by swirling wind, torrents of rain or icy blasts despite being held in May or June. This year, we stole a march on the weather imps. The original date had to be moved because of some orphaned lambs (another story), but the sprites failed to get the news. So on the original date, May 17<sup>th</sup>, if you remember, there was a brief monsoon. On the new date, a week later, the sun shone, a gentle breeze took the edge off the high temperatures and we celebrated in style, with coffee, tea, cakes and the most beautiful views at Bentley Farm.



Last month also, we were considering the WI Resolutions for the year, which will be addressed in early June at the AGM in Liverpool. As a bit of a gimmick, but with serious environmental credentials, two ladies from West Malvern WI have *walked* from Malvern to Liverpool, sharing their environmental concerns along the way. Yes, walked! WI members along the way provided bed and breakfast every 12-14 miles of the 170 mile journey. One of our members hosted the two ladies on their first stop, which was the wettest start you can imagine and also involved a herd of cows and a barbed wire fence! Anyway, clothes and bags dried out, and boots nearly, they continued on their way next morning. For those that are interested, the tales of their adventures will be in a future issue of *WI Life*.

Our monthly meeting convened with a rather depleted group, owing to a major bowls competition, several holidays and a house move. Those unable to attend this month missed an absolute treat. Billed as “A Talk with a Difference”, John and Annette Christophers, from Albrighton Pottery, entertained and enchanted us with a history of potting from the very earliest urban settlements to a history of kiln making and usage during the industrial revolution in Stoke on Trent. We also had a practical exercise, in which we all made clay medallions. Annette somehow fashioned these into the most beautiful bowl, which, after firing, will come back to our WI group. She used a technique, which archaeological excavations have discovered, dates back about 6000 years. Probably originally using rush baskets, clay was plastered thickly on the inside, left to dry out and baked in the fire. The basket burned away and a round bottomed pot was left, often with beautiful markings in the sides from the rushes. Annette used the same principle, albeit with a pot and a gauze sheet, but achieved the same beautiful rounded shape.



In conjunction with humorous asides, John gave us a wealth of facts about clay: that it is the weathered remains of rock deposited in streams; that graphite for pencils has clay mixed with it to determine the hardness of the lead; that clay slurry is used in the process of drilling for oil. He also drew our attention to the pervasive nature of clay in our lives by asking us to consider first the outside of our houses and what might be left if all clay products were removed: bricks, tiles, sewer pipes, chimney stacks. And then the inside: all basins and toilets, all floor tiles, all wall tiles, all crockery and so it goes on. Finally, to complete our delight was the display of ceramics that John's potting and Annette's decoration had produced, from chunky batik style decorated bowls, to the most exquisite hand painted porcelain. Several early Christmas presents were purchased. Funny, warm and so very talented, Annette and John were super guest speakers.



Looking ahead, many of the group are off to Attingham Park on a day trip this month. Built in 1785 as a statement of wealth and importance on the site of the previous Tern Hall, Altringham is a fine Georgian mansion with intricate decoration, Regency furniture and art, splendid stables, a walled garden and a deer park. At Atcham on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, it is well worth a visit. Then later in the month, we compete in the annual Shrawley Cup competition, held this year in Hallow. We are entering two teams and hope to come back victorious with the cup (or actually, the beautiful crystal bowl!) A strawberry tea at Little Witley, President's Evening and a visit to Bonterre Farm for a Lavender Day will complete our activities before our summer break, until the first meeting back at 7.30 pm on September 7<sup>th</sup>.