



## Wolston WI News – April 2018

Laura Ashley

During March we held two willow weaving workshops run by Christina Wells and everyone who attended said how much they had enjoyed it and were pleased with the items they had made. The most popular item that was made was the dragonfly, but trays, rings and fish were completed.

The Warwickshire Federation Annual that was held in March was very special as Jane Gibbs on behalf of Wolston W.I. was presented with a certificate for reaching its centenary and this was presented by Lynne Stubbings, National Federation Women's Institute Chair. Another important event was that Ruth McCartney was made a Trustee, congratulations Ruth.

A visit to see Oklahoma at the Royal Spa Centre, Leamington, was another event organised this month which several members went to and enjoyed the very good performance of this classic musical.

Jo Carter who is an historical tour guide, was our guest speaker this month, and came to talk to us about Laura Ashley. She told us about how Laura had overcome many difficulties from her school days and the early days of her marriage when with little money she often lived in extreme poverty. A big contrast to the time when her business flourished and was able to own properties in this country and abroad plus a yacht. Laura had joined the WRENS and met her husband Bernard at a dance. He had joined the Gurkhas and when he was posted to India they corresponded by letter and married in 1949. It was of particular interest to us that between 1945 and 1952 Laura undertook some development work for the Women's Institute on quilting. This renewed her interest in the craft and she started designing small items such as scarves and tea towels which Bernard printed on a machine he had designed. Big name companies like Liberty and John Lewis started retailing them. The business had mixed fortunes as they lost a lot of money when a flood destroyed their premises and stock and then when they moved to Wales they could not afford to give workers wages but paid them "in kind". Eventually they overcome the difficulties and the business succeeded.

Next month we will not be having a speaker as it is the time we discuss the resolution for this year which is Mental Health Matters.

*Jean Morgan*