

WINCLE & DISTRICT WI

Angie Page kindly stepped in to chair the meeting on April 5th as Suzanne Henshall was recovering from Covid. The Cloud Coffee morning was most enjoyable at The NLC, Congleton with all the Cloud WI's hosting a stall, to give a taste of their particular WI, along with coffee and cakes. Our Spring Cloud Meeting is on May 4th with an original calendar girl as the speaker. Tickets are £5 each.



The 1st Scarecrow meeting took place last month at Judith Bayley's house and good progress was made with our 'Queen'. More meetings are planned to continue with the Jubilee theme, ready for the 'unveiling' at the end of May.

The speaker at our April meeting was Peter Aston who came to tell us about the '**Journey from Apples to the Old Saw Mill**'. It was one of the most entertaining and inspiring talks we've ever had! His story began in 2009 at a seed swap event organised by Congleton Sustainability Group, when nobody wanted 50kg of rather unremarkable apples. Not wanting to waste them, he managed to gather another 50kg of unwanted apples and took them along to Eddisbury Fruit Farm where they were turned into 109 bottles of apple juice. In 2010 he put out a plea for any unwanted apples, resulting that year in 1200 bottles of apple juice, which were again sold for the charity at farmers' markets and by the National Trust at Little Moreton Hall and Biddulph Grange.

Then Glossop High Peak Juice folded, and Peter raised £4500 to buy their kit so that now 15-20 tons of donated apples is gathered each year and turned into apple juice, cider (old fashioned scrumpy) and cider vinegar (this takes 2 years). No preservatives; no sugar.

The next part of his fascinating story concerned the Old Saw Mill, down a back street 150m from the centre of Congleton. There had been a couple of fires in the mill and it had been empty for 5 years – empty, that is, except for loads of rubbish and junk. He raised £25m for its re-wiring and refurbishment and in October 2016 it opened, not only selling apple juice but as a community café selling coffee, tea and cake. It is a not-for-profit organisation, run by 5 paid staff and 25-30 volunteers. There are also meeting rooms which are used to help, for example, people with mental health problems and there is a domestic abuse clinic. Other rooms used for yoga, Pilates and Zumba. We particularly enjoyed hearing about an experience in January 2017. Peter was contacted about a potential VIP visit. Absolutely no details were given, but a host of security folk inspected the premises extremely thoroughly and bomb disposal dogs also romped around sniffing. The café had to close to the public on the day. Eventually they heard that the visitors were to be Charles and

Camilla – but the instructions were: ‘Don’t offer them food: don’t offer them drink: don’t shake hands’ and they were told how to address them. Not a hugely enticing build up!
But the visit was a great pleasure and Peter described C&C as lovely people. Charles *did* shake hands. And he *did* have a drink - both apple juice and cider. They showed genuine interest in all that the Old Mill was doing.

The Old Mill had already begun delivering food to people in the community who were immobile when Covid struck. The government grant enabled it to keep going and food deliveries increased. On Thursday they cooked hot meals which were delivered to socially isolated people on Friday each week. The town council helped here at first and then in July 2020 locals began to volunteer. Now each volunteer delivers to a group of 8-10 people and 120 meals are delivered each week. If the recipient is able to pay, it costs £4 for a main plus pud, otherwise it’s free. On Christmas day there is a lunch for those on their own – another sponsored event - and there are occasional Friday night fund raising events with good food and wine.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the talk (and the taster of apple juice we were given afterwards) and the Old Saw Mill will definitely be the coffee stop of choice next time we visit Congleton.

Judy Weeks

We have welcomed 2 new members this month, with another in the ‘pipeline’, bringing us to 31 in total. Our new venue gives us plenty of space, a warm room and comfy chairs, so please come along as a guest, if you are interested in our WI.

The next meeting is on May 3rd when we hear all about The Blood Bike Service. Meetings start at 7.30pm, and usually finish by 10pm at the latest. If more information is required please contact either Judith Bayley on 01260 227253129 or Suzanne Henshall on 01260 227209.

S Henshall