

Sutherland Federation Remembered.

Clashmore, they pioneered it all,
By meeting in Carnegie Hall.
To Ross-shire though they did belong
'Til eight more Institutes came along.

By '28 Institutes numbered nine
A meeting was called – they'd reached the time.
With Ross-shire then the ties were severed
And matters now in Sutherland covered.

Mrs Menzies took the chair,
With a dozen other ladies there.
They set the subs – one and a tanner
And dealt with all in business manner.

Carnegie grants were there at hand
So Institutes some classes planned,
To encourage members increase their learning
In drama, crafts and choral singing.

The ladies quickly took control
And organised their first big show.
An annual event was soon established,
And for it all the silver polished.

Drama proved a great success
And soon their skills were put to test.
At a Brora festival they competed
Nine teams in all, on stage were greeted.

To Edinburgh the winners then did go
Even in 1930 Brora stole the show.
They competed alongside Scotland's best
And took 4th place in the honours list.

Each year more Institutes joined the throng
As more and more ladies came along.
Six hundred plus members at its peak
With several Institutes meeting each week.

Days of the meetings were oft decided
When members by the full moon guided
Could safely travel there and back
For cars and street lights, they did lack.

Then Mrs Findlay toured the county
Her boxes full of hidden bounty.
Inside each box –embroidered riches
But t'was her recitations had them in stitches.

Not only in drama did members compete,
But Clyne had several pairs of feet
All well trained up, to win - no less,
At folk dancing, down in Inverness.

Assynt started each new meeting
With mottos as a sign of greeting.
"Face powder may catch a man", we hear,
"But it takes baking powder to hold him dear."

Co-operative entries for the Show
Were a challenge, even more than now.
Forty edible articles members were taking,
Home grown or home-made, but certainly no baking.

Christmas pressies for a family of ten
'With no more than twenty' – it said in the gen.
But the table too was bigger there
It had to be forty-two inches square.

Entertainment was often simplistic,
With members providing all kinds of music,
Readings, and stories, and poetry too.
For, from time to time, speakers were few.

Competitions then were so much fun –
Like guess the weight of two onions,
Or make a pot scrubber from heather,
Best carrot tops or polished leather.

Tongue twisters was yet another one,
Or peeling tatties with a blindfold on.
They were also lifting peas with chopsticks
And even knitting on two matchsticks!

A competition was often decided,
By the pennies put beside it.
The funds were boosted by these votes,
'Two and eightpence tonight', one minute quotes.

The Rural ladies would organise all –
Children's' parties and whists held in their hall,
Concerts and outings were all on their card
And most held a meal to remember our Bard.

The annual egg collections were made
To give to the hospitals, so it is said.
Two thousand, three hundred were handed in
At a Lochinver meeting in thirty-nine.

Priorities changed with the onset of war
Comforts for soldiers were needed afar.
Needles were clicking from morning till night
As members knitted to ease their plight.

Socks by the hundreds, mittens by the score
Helmets and mufflers, they knitted even more.
Money too was needed, so the ladies did their best,
To see to the fundraising from East coast to the West.

Then from kitchen centres in the county
Jam was made to sell in plenty,
From surplus fruit that gardeners had.
Three thousand jars in all were made.

Remnants of tweed by Clyne members were gathered
Then rubber from tubes that had been discarded.
They sewed them and glued them and made them real neat,
To fit them on hospital patients' feet.

In the Community too, war efforts we've done,
Like recycling paper and bones, by the ton.
Used stamps we sent for a hospital cot.
And gave out cod liver oil, believe it or not.

Way back in nineteen forty two,
Love was in the air – it's true.
For up in Tongue six members wed
In the space of six months, the minutes read.

Clashmore ladies did their bit
Their social evenings quite a hit.
Each member brought two friends for the chance
To partner the Servicemen at the dance.

At one such do in forty-four,
I wonder what the ladies wore?
For Servicemen home after five years away,
Picked their pin-up girl – bet that made their day!

A raffle then raised funds for one,
Twenty-three and sixpence was the sum.
Members were hoping they'd be their size
For a pair of nylons was the prize!

In 51, at the Bulb Show we hear,
Members came from far and near.
Each to view the great display –
Two thousand bulbs were entered that day.

A lady came to mend or make do
Of useful items she made quite a few.
From parachute silk, with none wasted she felt,
A nightie, a handbag and a suspender belt.

So in Brora their members had a go.
Their challenge was a blouse to sew.
Materials weren't hard to muster –
For they'd to make it using only dusters!

Each year our Shows were well supported,
Then in '57 it was reported,
"The Bulb Show's cancelled" said Federation
"For petrol has been put on ration."

The Federation also speakers did lure,
To come and do a mini tour.
They'd visit Institutes each week
And to each one in turn would speak.

Singers came – with machines, by the way.
And Cadbury's came – bringing Milk Tray?
They'd Brooke Bond along with samples of tea
Who entertained all with their ads from TV.

Twice there was a chill in the air,
For Walls Ice Cream were also here.
And Birds Eye too gave us a call
With samples of cream cakes there for all.

We hit the headlines big one year
For in the P& J there did appear,
A report of wifies on a bus-
I guess they didn't want a fuss.

Through a blizzard they had tried to go
After all it was only snow.
The bus soon stuck and all got off
To spread some grit across the stuff.

Now the bus was on its way,
How they'd get home was hard to say.
But soon they were welcomed in Achfary,
All warmed up with a glass of sherry!

In 1970, or so it is said,
An amendment to the rules was read.
For members, they felt, just had to know
'You must have hens to put eggs in the show!'

Then in 2015, there was great consternation,
Members were angry throughout the Nation.
Our image they said was starting to falter.
Our motto, our mag and our badge were to alter.

No longer would 'Rural' appear in our name,
We knew right away things would not be the same.
'Women Together' was the motto instead.
'For Home and Country' was apparently dead.

Plans were afoot now, for yet more celebration,
Garden parties to be held in each corner of the Nation.
There were programmes on telly, trees planted on the green
To Celebrate SWI's Centenary in 2017!

By '19, t' was obvious, that things were getting tough
Our membership was dwindling; it seemed folks had enough
Of serving on committee and keeping us up to date
We sent a plea round members, but no one took the bait.

Then out of the blue, our lives came to a stop
When a pandemic in '20, caught us all on the hop.
The virus moved fast causing much devastation
Everything cancelled throughout the whole Nation.

We couldn't meet family, neighbour or friend
All social activity had come to an end.
T'was just for three weeks, we were led to believe
What the future would hold, was hard to perceive.

A sign of the times - sadly over the years,
Numbers have dropped, raising all kind of fears.
With no meetings allowed in a hall or a room
Federation resorted to their AGM on Zoom.

Twenty -twenty one: we were still kept indoors
And sadly found out that Federation's no more
It's a very sad ending to a great organisation
Ninety-three years since its formation.

We have much to be thankful, looking back o'er the years
We've shared so much happiness but also some tears.
Let's toast then the women who started it all
And committees thereafter who answered the call.

There were those good with letters or handling money
And those in the chair with outlook so sunny.
And last but not least, I'm sure you'll agree
The girls in the corner who were making the tea.
Let's raise a glass to Sutherland Federation SW(R)I

A lesson in decimals was to follow,
Some facts were very hard to swallow.
Like a shilling now would five pence be,
And a pound would have a hundred P!

In '71 we set out to arrange
With ladies from Holland a cultural exchange.
Their ladies came over and stayed with folks here
Then our members, in turn, put their plans in gear.

They sorted out transport and flights for them all
Arranged all the tours – boy would they have a ball!
The cost way back then was expensive, I fear,
But to us nowadays, £60 is not dear!

Brora still were our drama queens,
As year by year they entered teams,
From north to south, from east to west,
Every year they were among the best.

A short entertainment instead of a play
Saw North Federations in Elgin one day
The Dornoch members caused quite a riot
With their production of the 'Cambridge Diet'

92 was a time of big celebration
When Rural ladies throughout the nation
Rejoiced in the fact we were seventy-five
And keen to show Rural was still very alive.

All over Scotland the flag would progress
From the Borders right over the Ord of Caithness.
It came through the county by motorbike
With Joan Whittingham steering – we'd n'er seen the like.

The Rural's full of women who just love to cook,
And so we produced our own cookery book.
T'was called 'Rural Favourites', with photos enhanced
A request for a book even came in from France!

For the Millennium we decided to set up classes
We aimed to teach crafts to both lads and lasses.
We'd a hundred and fifty come through our doors
And fifteen members to show them the score.

We'd patchwork and crochet, knitted toys too
Quilling and quilting to name but a few.
At the end of the day, everyone had such fun
And were ever so proud of the things they had done.

Our ladies too in sports excel,
In bowling and in golf as well.
Our teams have challenged through the nation
And brought home trophies to Federation.

In 2007, again t'was our turn,
To have the National flag, we did learn
Where would we take it? What would we do?
A suggestion from Rosehall came out of the blue.

'We'll row it across Loch Shin in a boat,
Then we'll pipe it ashore.' – it was put to the vote.
First round Ferrycroft with flag leading the way
Everyone agreed it would be a great day.

As part of their 90th Headquarters thought
They'd have a Ruralympics and so they had sought
Women who'd take part in all kind of games
And so we set out to gather some names.

President Charlotte, Carol. Jeani and Anne
Were our reps and they soon had adopted a fan.
Marion Bayley from Newton encouraged them all
As they putted, threw darts and dribbled a ball.

The day was such fun, despite all the snow
And the girls were delighted they'd been able to go.
They all gave of their best – though they hit a brick wall
When the tangram pieces proved the box was too small!

Our own eightieth followed, hot on its tail
With a wonderful partyheld in Carbisdale.
Members donned their finery in readiness to dine,
Highland Council paid the buses and the Co-op gave the wine!

We still had demos and cookery talks
Though now using microwaves and even woks.
We had history, nature, recycling too,
Gardening, health issues, to name but a few.

There was papercraft, beadwork, encaustic art too
Felt making, computing – there was lots there to do.
And if you'd not tried them, there was always a chance
To join in a class – your skills to enhance.

Throughout the years, who would have believed
The targets we reached, the goals we achieved.
And for her work with the Rural, t'was great to see
Mrs. Calder, Lairg, get the MBE.

Then in 2015, there was great consternation,
Members were angry throughout the Nation.
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