



ACTIVITIES OF ASHTON WI IN SEPTEMBER 2013

The President, Marjory Facer, welcomed over eighty members and guests from other WIs and friends, to a very special meeting on 3rd September. Ashton WI provided delicious drinks, canapés and nibbles and the mood was set for welcoming a very special guest speaker.

A warm welcome was given to Kay Alexander who recently retired after working for over 30 years as a presenter and journalist for the BBC, latterly for BBC Midlands Today. Kay was originally from Surrey and read English at the University of Birmingham. She began work for the BBC at Pebble Mill for Radio 4 where she worked on “You and Yours”, Checkpoint and Woman`s Hour. She gave us a short résumé of her life with the BBC and the changes that have been made over the years – some good and some bad. She was presented with a special award from the Royal Television Society to mark her 30 years in television.

In the 2013 Birthday Honours, Kay was bestowed an MBE from the Queen after her many years in broadcasting and charity work. (She is a Patron of Acorns Children`s Hospice and considerably more Midlands charities). She is enthusiastically involved with Birmingham`s Assay Office and is now “Guardian” of the Assay Office after her term as Chairman and the first woman to ever hold this position!

Hallmarking was originally introduced in 1300 by a statute of Edward I and is one of the earliest forms of consumer protection. Kay explained that due to the high value of gold, platinum and silver, there are significant profits to be gained by reducing the precious metal content of an alloy when manufacturing, so the use of compulsory hallmarking by experts, buyers can be assured that they are purchasing the correct amount of precious metal in their purchase. There has been a decline in the hallmarking industry, due to the huge cost of precious metals, but Kay assured us that the quality of products from this country is second to none and there are many students still training

to be assay officers and jewellery makers. Birmingham is the largest office and there are three others in the U.K.

Due mainly to Kay's efforts, a new Birmingham Assay Office is to be built and the Jewellery Quarter will also become a superb visitor centre. She concluded her talk with the news that she and her husband were expecting their second grandchild at any moments and this was a wonderful note to finish from such a warm, sincere and eloquent lady.



Mollie chatting to Kay

Later in the month 15 members visited Hartlebury Museum and Castle. On a fine morning we arrived just in time for a quick coffee and quickly set off to explore the many rooms at the museum. Hartlebury Castle was originally built in the 13th century and was a large manor house. This was developed over time to be the Bishops Palace, the home of the Bishop of Worcester and remained the home for successive Bishops. In 2006, after the then Bishop moved to live near the Cathedral, it became a museum housing a huge collection of items relating to Worcestershire`s rural and industrial life through the ages.

There were exhibits and photographs of the work of the Bromsgrove Guild of Applied Art. The Guild, which was dissolved in 1960, produced many items worked in metal, wood, plaster, bronze, tapestry glass and other mediums. They are famed for producing the main gates to Buckingham Palace. We then explored large barns holding beautifully restored gypsy caravans, a working blacksmith and much more. After a hearty lunch served in the original kitchen, everyone agreed it had been a most interesting and informative visit.



Pam on the steps of one of the caravans



A photograph taken in 1910 of pupils of Ashton under Hill School



Admiring the State Rooms