

# 'The WI fits in with my work at Parliament'

MIXING HER FASCINATING JOB AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS WITH WI LIFE IS A PERFECT BALANCE FOR **CHRISTINE RANDALL**

Words CHARLOTTE MCINTYRE Photography KIKI STREITBERGER

**When I was 40 I decided to go back to work** as my children were getting older. I saw a job advertised for a maternity cover position in the House of Commons library for two days a week and decided to go for it. Luckily, I was offered the role and gradually the position became permanent and then full time. After a couple of years, I moved over to what is now called the Chamber and Committee Service, working on a number of select committees. The purpose of these committees is to scrutinise the work of the various government departments.

**Currently I work on the Justice Committee**, but in the past I have also worked on the Defence Committee, the Welsh Affairs committee and Committee of Public Accounts. The Justice Committee meets once a week when the House is sitting and as Senior Committee Assistant I am responsible for Committee admin. This includes arranging room bookings, drafting and circulating papers, liaising with witnesses who have been called by the Committee to give evidence, dealing with finances and arranging its visits, to prisons, for instance.

**The WI fits in perfectly with my job.** I worked full time for 18 years but around two years ago I reduced my hours to three days a week. The Alexandra WI, Middlesex Federation meets on a Tuesday evening and, although that's a busy day because the Committee usually meets on Tuesday mornings, I still make time to go to the WI. We're quite an active group and there are always lots of events planned. A few weeks ago, for example, we visited a National Trust property in Hackney, Sutton House. We also have theatre outings at least once a year, and a visit to Reculver Beacon WI, Kent-East Kent Federation, our sister group in Herne Bay, is arranged for the summer.

**I was first introduced to the WI by a friend. Gill and I met more than 30 years ago in the NCT** when our children were babies and we've kept in touch ever since. I had heard a lot about the WI, especially when London ones were being created, and I thought it sounded interesting. Gill told me she was a member and that her WI meets where we first met with



In 1908 a suffragette symbolically chained herself to this statue of Viscount Falkland

our babies - I felt it was meant to be.

**It's given me so much.** I first went to meetings as a way of keeping in touch with Gill, I've since made so many new friends. We have a wide range of activities and I always try to join in with whatever is going on. We do a lot of crafts and have interesting speakers - one group even taught us some circus skills.

**I'm also a member of the National Child Development Study.**

It's a government study of every child born in the UK during the first week of March 1958. All the mothers were asked to fill in questionnaires and the babies were given a series of tests. Then at different stages throughout our lives we would be asked to complete interviews and questionnaires to gather research on how certain things, such as health, social mobility and education can influence your life.

The findings are fascinating. For example, they found evidence that babies weighed less if the mother smoked during pregnancy, compared with mothers who didn't smoke. The study isn't particularly well known but it is really interesting to be part of it, and it provides very useful research for academics and policy-makers.

**WI members do so many interesting things.** Our September meeting is called the 'members' meeting', where we find out more about one another. The first time I went along, we were asked to discover three interesting things about the woman sitting next to us, and then to give a talk about her to the group.

I think people often don't realise there are a lot of employees working in Parliament, supporting the MPs. The following year, three members - an architect, a lawyer for a charity and an engineering lecturer - gave talks about their jobs. Then, the year after that, the WI asked me to do the same thing and I spoke about my work, which members found interesting.

Learning about other members is great as we all do so many different - and often surprising - things.

▪ **Christine Randall is a member of The Alexandra WI, Middlesex Federation**