

WI Life

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INSPIRING WOMEN

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Viking revival

Anglo-Saxons, narrow boats and the WI – why life began at 60 for Georgina Riall

Cheque mate?

Why the clock is ticking for the humble cheque

Call me 'Debo'

Meeting the refreshingly down-to-earth Dowager Duchess of Devonshire

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INSPIRING WOMEN

There's no such thing as a stereotypical WI member. In each issue we profile one amazing, ordinary member to find out what inspired her to join the WI.

'I spent 10 years looking after elderly relatives and decided it was time for some fun.'

Georgina Riall

Since 2002 life has been one glorious long holiday, though not exotically so. I decided to live on a narrow boat, join a Viking re-enactment society, and become a member of the WI. I've always been a little hedonistic – a bit like the cricket, as opposed to the ant. I'd spent 10 years looking after elderly relatives and decided it was time for some fun.

Before I joined the Viking Society I knew nothing about the Anglo-Saxon era, except that Alfred burnt some cakes and Harold got an arrow in his eye. I remember seeing my first re-enactment event at Kirby Hall in Northamptonshire and thinking, wow – this is it!

From small babies in arms to the old and the bold of both sexes, period re-enactment attracts people of all ages and types. Since joining I've learnt to embroider and tablet-weave, and now take part in about 20 re-enactments a year at castles, halls and national heritage sites around the UK. I make all my own costumes using authentic cloth and decorative tablet braids. As a hobby, I can't recommend it enough.

Being an Anglo-Saxon must have been pretty tough. There were several dreadful winters, no flushing toilets and dentistry was non-existent – when your teeth fell out, that was it. The public ask a lot of questions so it's important that we're boned up on history.

I've a feeling that people like me without so much ambition are usually happier. There's something horrid about the modern preoccupation that everything's got to have an outcome or a motive for doing it. I don't have a vast mansion or the latest car so I don't miss that kind of thing.

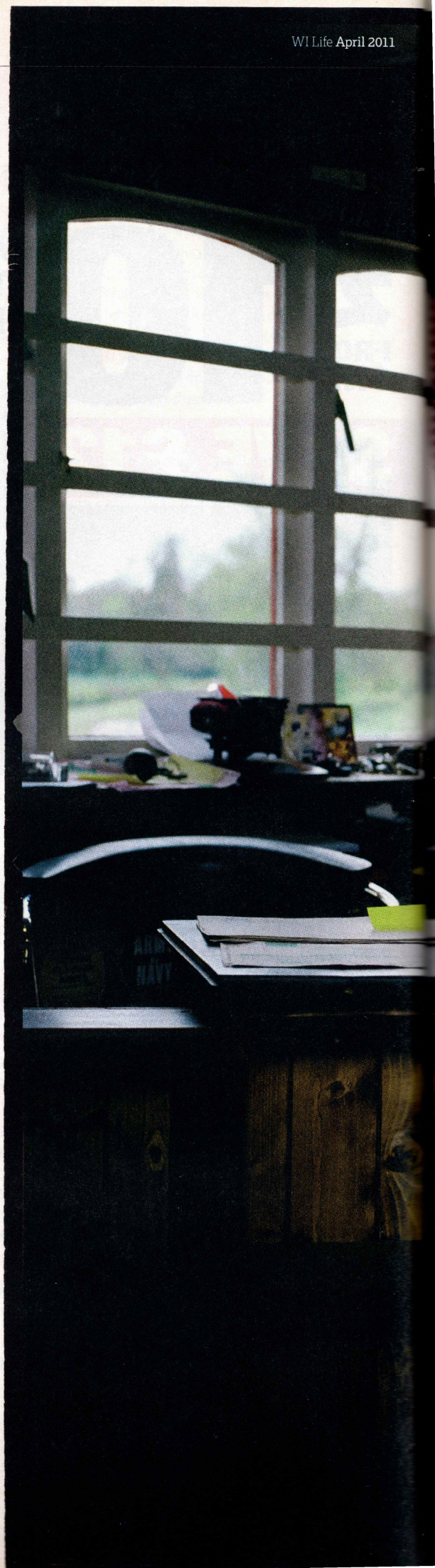
There's a slight gypsy quality to living on a boat. In London you can live on the same street your whole life and never know your neighbours. I'm friends with all the people who live on the surrounding boats. There's great community spirit and living 'outside' feels like a healthier way to live.

For me, the WI is a different world and becoming a member has allowed me to meet a completely new set of people with varied interests. I love the friendship and feeling of Englishness that comes with being a WI member. Having lived in Spain, France and Morocco, I was looking for that sense of belonging. Moving to a new area can make you feel like a bit of an interloper which is why the WI is so important.

I'm methodical. You have to be living on a boat. There's always something to be done like checking the engine or going for water. I'd be lost without the radio which I listen to while working on my embroidery projects. Every now and then I'll do something really 21st century, like have a cigarette.

There are no downsides to living on a narrow boat. Not that I know of, anyway. As Ratty said in *The Wind in the Willows*, there's nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. **WI**

For more information about the Viking Society, visit www.vikingsonline.org.uk





Georgina Riall is a re-enactor for the Viking Society. She has been a member of Hunsbury Hill WI, Northamptonshire, for eight years

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