|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

**14th June 2021 at 20.00**

**Meeting on Zoom**

**Chaired by:** Sarah Minister and Sally Knipe

**Number of participants:** 35 members 3 guests plus speaker

Sarah welcomed members to the meeting and introduced the speaker Mark Francis who was a contestant on the 6th series of The British Sewing Bee which aired during the first lockdown and has become the most viewed series even transferring to BBC1.

Mark talked about his childhood and how his grandfather who owned a treadle Singer sewing machine would alter his older brother’s clothes so that they fitted him and removed the 1970’s flares and large collars to make them fashionable for his generation. At the time he did not appreciate the skill his grandfather had to be able to needed to remove collars and undertake the alterations. Mark had a few sewing lessons at school but in classes of 40 it was not well taught which he regrets as he describes himself as practical, musical and creative rather than academic.

His partner sews and he followed him in completing an Introduction to Sewing Course where his first garment made was a nightshirt out of bedlinen he had inherited from his great aunt. The application form for appearing on the Sewing Bee was completed by his husband and Mark described saying “yes” to it being submitted was a turning point in his life. He really didn’t think that he was the best amateur sewer or good enough to apply. But he was unhappy at work and his job in banking was stressful. The application process was long but he kept on getting through each round and as it went he became more excited about the venture.

The final audition was in London which he was not confident in going to from Warwickshire with 4 rounds and 20 -25 other wannabe contestants. Mark said that in retrospect that making the garments was secondary and the production team was interested in personality and how people interacted with the camera.

He said that the production team was very supportive and that Joe (Lycett) was the most fun. The models became their unexpected allies and they were also fascinated seeing the garments being created. The judges were warm and friendly and Esme Young in particular would drop nuggets of information as she was a teacher at heart. In reality the judging lasted longer than the few minutes screened on the show so as the series progressed they learnt from their mistakes, what the judges were looking for and discovered that they were more capable than they first thought. Mark was placed 5th in the series and he discovered that you do not need to win for it to change one’s life.

Watching The Sewing Bee crew enjoying work and switching off at the end of the day made Mark realise that he could change his life and he left his Banking job. He is now happy and credits appearing on the show with giving him the confidence to changing his life. He now is a brand ambassador for sewing related companies and gives demonstrations on Freeview channel 72, gives talks and launching patterns - see his website sewmarkfrancis.com

Mark then took questions from members

**Business:**

**Friendship fund.** Jo, Treasurer asked members whether the Wing should contribute to The WI Friendship Fund. It was agreed by a show of hands to contribute a £1 a member as we had done in previous years. She explained that the fund supported Ashtead Wing financially when it was first formed.

**Recording of today’s meeting** to be made available to members for one month on the Wing website

**WI Resolution** – Sally Joint President said that the speeches re: A call to increase awareness of the subtle signs of ovarian cancer from the annual meeting were on the My WI website if members wanted to listen to them. The meeting voted to support the resolution by a show of hands.

**Date of next meeting 12th July**. Plan for the next meeting will have to be changed after the covid restrictions remaining in place for another 4 weeks. To be discussed at the next committee meeting

**Baptist Hall:** if WI guidelines and Baptist Hall rules allow the plan is to return to our hall for the September meeting