

rch of mums' army

Casting off the knitting for new role

FAR from being a legion of blanket-knitters, the Mothers' Union is a power in the modern Church. NICK HAWCROFT reports.

A HUNDRED years ago, Mrs Augusta Anne MacLagan, wife of the then Archbishop of York, set up a Church group for a handful of mothers in York.

Yesterday, thousands of Mothers' Union members converged on the city to celebrate the centenary of the organisation in the York diocese.

The Mothers' Union is one of the most misunderstood organisations in the Church. It has a far deeper role than just knitting blankets for Ethiopia.

With its overriding concern for the welfare of the family, the Mothers' Union tackles problems related to abortion, violence in marriage, and homelessness. It recently held a conference in York on AIDS.

Some members keep an eye on television, assessing programmes and passing on their views to the companies concerned. Others run a creche at Full Sutton prison, near Stamford Bridge. Thousands of pounds a day is raised for charity.



The Dean of York, the Very Rev John Southgate, releases centenary balloons.



The Mothers' Union supports nearly 150 field workers overseas, among them teachers, nurses and social workers. It has strong links with missions in Nigeria and The Gambia.

Members still do the washing-up but Mrs Vera Woodhouse, diocesan president, reckons the Mothers' Union is growing and shaking off the image of being simply Church caterers.

"In the past few years, we

have had many new members join."

More than 2,500 members from across the region filled York Minster for yesterday's gathering.

Banners from 170 branches were carried in procession from St William's College nearby.

After the service, 100 balloons were released outside by the Dean of York, the Very Rev John Southgate.

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Habgood, said that the Mothers' Union was buzzing with creative and workable ideas.

He told members: "You are always recognised by the Mothers' Union badges on your lapels, the smiles on your faces and the hands in the sink. But you are more than a parish workforce."

The Mothers' Union had a vital role to play in spreading Christianity to young people.

"Teenage children are the

vulnerable members of our society, who are the least influenced by the Christian faith," said Dr Habgood.

"There is an enormous exodus from our churches at around the age of 14 or 15, or sometimes even younger. We need to reach out to this age group."

The Mothers' Union grew from an idea by a rector's wife in Old Alresford, near Winchester. Mary Sumner thought mothers in the village should meet regularly at the rectory to help them realise more fully their responsibilities as wives and parents.

It is said the Devil fears a Christian mother more than he does 12 saints. Mrs Pat Harris, central president, explained why.

"We are an unstoppable force for good. In the Mothers' Union, the Church has thousands of committed Christians who have promised to grow in their faith. It's an army of faithful workers."

THEY SAY 'WHITE LADY' IS GHOST OF A NUN

The account in the "Express" on April 11 of ghostly happenings at a Boston Spa house, has revived speculation in the neighbouring villages of Clifford and Bramham about the "White Lady," said by some older residents to be the ghost of a nun which divides its activities between the two villages.

Many people claim to have seen the ghost and one, a Boston Spa woman, Mrs Jane Tasker, of 6, The Square, Grove Road, related the following experience to the "Express" this week:

"I was walking home from Bramham one Saturday night about seven or eight years ago. I had just reached the part of Clifford Road called Cabbage Hall Hill when, as I passed the broken tree at the bottom of the hill, I saw a white swirling circle which stopped at my side and took the form of a shrouded woman.

"I couldn't see her face because she was facing to the front. I said 'Hello.' When she didn't answer I started to run. The ghost started to run too.

"I ran right to the top of the hill, and when I stopped,

unable to run any more, the ghost disappeared into a small holly bush at the side of the road

"There was no moon and no car lights to cast a shadow, and, as I hadn't heard about the ghost before then, it could not have been my imagination."

Still vivid

Mrs Tasker said she discovered later that the apparition was the ghost of a nun which appeared only at certain times of the year and never to more than one person at a time. It looked to be guiding her along, and it made no sound.

Her memory of the experience was still vivid, and she had never dared to venture down that part of Clifford Road at night since.

She had spoken to many other people in the two villages who claimed to have seen the "White Lady."

Another version is that the ghost is that of a headless woman who patrols the bridge at the foot of Cabbage Hall Hill.

Day of prayer held

THE Boston Spa area annual inter-denominational service for the Women's World Day of Prayer was held in St. Luke's Church, Clifford, and organised by Mrs. Mary June Scott.

The "leader" for the service, Mrs. Mary Dixon, of Stutton, welcomed the congregation with a call to worship from the women of Australia who had prepared this year's order of service.

The readers and narrators were Mrs. Dora Pattman and Mrs. Sheila Humphries, from Boston Spa Methodist Church, Mrs. Christine Shaw and Mrs. Grace Field, from Bramham Parish Church, and Mrs. Veronica Fahy and Mrs. Sadie Boyd, from St. Edward's R.C. Church. The organist was Mr. John Smallwood.

Mrs. Dixon introduced the speaker, Mrs. Alice Ferguson from Sicklinghall, who is director of "Women of the Word", an interdenominational trust committed to outreach for women everywhere, who organise "workshops" in Leeds and Harrogate.

A collection amounting to £38 was taken for the on-going work of the Women's World Day of Prayer and of the Christian literature societies. After the service refreshments were served in the Church by the ladies of St. Luke's.

BRAMHAM

Women's World Day Of Prayer. — A sum of £22 was collected for the work of the Christian Literature Societies during the interdenominational service in Bramham Parish Church on Friday morning for the Women's World Day of Prayer. This year's theme was "Spiritual Growth" and the order of service was written by women at the Pan-African leadership course in Mindolo, Zambia. Throughout the Christian world during the 24 hours this service was being conducted by women in many and varied languages and places of worship. In Bramham the address was given by Mrs. E. Burton of Aberford. Mrs. C. Shaw led the service and the readers

were Mrs. P. Clarke, Mrs. P. Tarry, Mrs. M. Hodge, Mrs. M. J. Scott, Mrs. E. Middleton, Mrs. P. Machin, Mrs. B. Whattam and Mrs. D. Kemp. The organist was Mr. M. Pretty and the Vicar, the Rev. D. Shaw, gave the blessing. Afterward, Mrs. Shaw and members of Bramham Mothers' Union provided refreshments at the vicarage.



● **BRAMHAM M.U.** members awaiting their guests are (left to right): Miss Stockdale, Mrs. Field, Mrs. Stang, Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Whattham. (S)

Anniversary service

A **SPECIAL** service of holy communion was held at Bramham Parish Church on Saturday to mark the 75th anniversary of Bramham Mothers' Union.

In addition to present members, it was intended by former members and representatives from Boston Spa and Thorp Arch.

The epistle was read by Mrs. P. Burton, of Aberford, a former deanery presiding member, and the reader of the gospel was Mrs. Pat Tarry, the Boston Spa presiding member.

The Mothers' Union banner was carried by Mrs. Molly Stockdale, the daughter of a founder member, and the objects of the union were read by Mrs. D. Stang.

A social gathering was held afterwards in the church hall when a 75th birthday cake, made by Mr. Stang, was cut and Mrs. Burton showed slides of Mothers' Union work.