

TV REVIEW

Community service

Deborah Hill Cone is charmed by a funny documentary on knocking shops.

WHO WOULD have guessed a documentary about brothels could be charming, life-affirming and funny?

Not me. But *A WI Lady's Guide to Brothels* on TV One this Tuesday is just that.

The WI stands for Women's Institute, and in England it is generally considered to be a repository of stuffy blue-rinse ladies in twinsets and pearls. But think again. The Women's Institute caused a storm in Britain when it passed a resolution calling for prostitution to be legalised in a bid to make life safer for working girls. They "put aside jam-making and tea towels to take a brave stand against stupidity".

The campaign, spearheaded by two remarkable older women, Jean Johnson and Shirley Landels, led to this documentary where the pair travelled the world to research whether they could set up "the perfect brothel". They were investigating how prostitutes could be safe and have decent working conditions. This was all very informative and opened up a world that most people don't know much about. At the same time journalist Nicky Taylor was in Hampshire looking at whether one could set up a brothel there.

Jean and Shirley visited brothels where prostitution had been legalised: Amsterdam, Nevada and New Zealand. Their quest led to some delightful absurdities as the chintzy pair were introduced to the sex industry. "Could you give me some information about the arse midget?" Jean asks in a sex shop in her cut-glass posh accent. "Oh look, a glow-in-the-dark vibrator. Absolutely super!"

The fascinating documentary takes us behind closed doors in brothels.

"Oh look, the basin is the same height as a gentleman, so he can wash his little bits and pieces."

In one brothel there is porn on a television, which shocks Jean. "Goodness gracious me. I'm



ARRESTING ISSUE: Nicky Taylor takes her stand in *A WI Lady's Guide To Brothels*.

a little peculiar about that." Fortunately, Shirley didn't see the hard-core porn because the steep stairs were a bit too much for her. Otherwise she might have had a heart attack.

Jean and Shirley conclude brothels in Holland and the United States are exploitative and sleazy, but they find the perfect brothel in Auckland — a posh establishment called Bonton. "In brothel circles Bonton is spoken of as the holy grail," the voiceover says. In this knocking shop there is a whiteboard with an orgasm tally. "To have seven or eight orgasms a day, it puts you in a good mood," says one of the girls. Meanwhile, back in Hampshire, Nicky has found a loophole in the law that would allow

the WI women to set up a mobile brothel, because legally a vehicle is not defined as "premises".

The magic of this doco is the gorgeous personality of all three of the women and how wonderfully matter of fact and non-judgmental they are about sex. It quite lifts the spirits to see this kind and good side of human nature.

A WI Lady's Guide to Brothels is an important piece of television and a vindication to anyone in this country who was involved in the law change to legalise prostitution here.

Real Life: A WI Lady's Guide To Brothels is on TV One, Tuesday, 9.30pm.