**Wantage Women’s Institute Annual Report for 2015/2016**

I am pleased to present our sixth Annual Report and I am happy to be able to feedback on a very successful, enjoyable and interesting year for Wantage Women’s Institute. Again the numbers have increased and now stand at 83 full members including 8 dual members.

Our Committee has undergone some changes this year; however Liz Dickins has remained our most dedicated and hard working President. Rita Hetherington has been our Vice President and Programme Planner, working hard behind the scenes to ensure the most interesting of WI meetings.

Sandra Mitchell continued as Treasurer and has achieved great things this year, including registering our WI for gift aid and has doggedly pursued the unenviable task of registering us as a charity.

Eileen Webster has remained a committee member keeping everyone in the WI up to date with the welfare needs of our members, making sure those who are unwell are contacted on a regular basis. This is a really valuable service. Just one of Eileen’s achievements this year was to set up a rota to drive one of our member’s husbands to the JR hospital in Oxford to visit his wife. Eileen continued to visit this member twice a week at Wantage hospital.

Lesley Royan has continued in the role of coordinating our WI with Denman College, a big job in itself, but she has also taken on the job of minutes secretary working in tandem with myself (Diane Monnery), a new committee member this year.

Veronica Kirby stepped down from the role of Secretary this year but remained a much valued committee member.

Jenny Forinton has continued being responsible for News and Views and bringing to our attention any relevant information or interesting trips that it might hold.

Jane Braithwaite was a new addition to the committee this year and as well as being a hardworking committee member she has been a valuable member of the events committee.

Our speakers throughout the year were interesting and very varied, organized by Rita Hetherington.

In April, we had an interesting slide show from Angela Panruker regarding “The Order of the Garter” an event she had attended many times over the years and has in fact prompted the events committee in to applying for tickets for next year’s event.

In May, Christine Wallace told us of her journey from illness to being a “Bake Off” celebrity. An inspirational tale.

June had Louise Batty getting is us in the holiday mood with her Saga Holiday Story. Some of us may now have even taken our first leap in to the world of cruising.

Julys’ talk went with a bang, delivered by Ian Jones, a tale about working in the bomb squad.

September had our very own Carol Doughty giving “A Nod to the WI” with her fabulous flower arranging demonstration.

Of course November is always given over to the Wantage WI birthday party when again the committee did us proud and lunch was accompanied by the beautiful singing voice of Annie Kingsbury of Anno Domini and lunch was finished off with an amazing cake made by Christine Wallace of said Bake Off fame.

The Christmas meeting saw Susan Howe giving her talk “From Betjeman to Bardot”. Well as you may imagine the talk was very much focused on our Wantage Betjeman’s with many of our ladies having their own interesting anecdotes regarding Sir John and Lady Penelope.

In January we were inspired by Keith Jansz and his foot and mouth painting. Keith was able bodied until a tragic car accident left him paralyzed from the chest down. He told us briefly what had happened and then talked about how he came to find a new interest in life when his mother-in-law gave him a book about painting.

The last meeting had Brian Lowe as speaker and he talked about CS Lewis and his contemporaries. He delivered the whole talk without notes and had an amazing memory for dates, names and events. From this we have been inspired to look at visiting The Kilns in Risinghurst where Lewis lived for many years.

The Events Committee led by Rita Hetherington with Liz Dickens, Jane Braithwaite and myself (Diane Monnery) arranged some very varied and great events. In April we had our third St. George’s Day lunch which again was very well attended. Bistro 14 did not disappoint nor did they disappoint when in October we returned for the Harvest lunch.

In May we made a return visit to Grey’s Court to see the glorious bluebells.

Liz Dickins organized a Corks and Canapés party on the 29 August which was very well attended.

On the 4 September a small group of us visited Oxford Botanical Gardens and Harcourt Arboretum. The weather stayed pleasant for us and the day was only interrupted by lunch and rounded off nicely in true WI fashion with tea and cakes at the Garden Centre.

On the 19 October 12 people went on the Oxford Ghost Walk. This was led by Bill Specter, a trained actor, dressed in a full Victorian undertaker's outfit. Starting from Oxford Castle we were led down dimly lit cobbled streets. Bill was magnificent with real fire and fake knives. A great evening finished off with dinner in Oxford.

In October, Liz Dickins organised and escorted a visit to Liverpool. This fabulous trip took in Port Sunlight, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Speke Hall, Palm House, Museum of Liverpool Life and the Albert Dock to name but a few highlights.

Our Charn group met as usual twice a year. Once in April and once in October. The April one was hosted by ourselves at Challow village hall and we produced the most amazing array of cakes you have ever seen, we did ourselves proud. The speaker was ‘She Veronique’ who talk on clothes, hair, dress and makeup from 1910 to 1950. A very touchy~touchy~feely~feely session as she passed around some beautiful gowns for us all to handle.

The second meeting at Haney in October had Julia Summers as speaker. Julia has written a number of books including “Home Fires” which tells the story of the lives of ordinary women who joined the WI and helped the war effort in a variety of ways. Her book was also turned into a six part television series and recently shown on ITV entitled “Jam and Jerusalem”. She was an excellent, enthusiastic speaker with a fantastic memory for the facts and figures that she quoted.

Of course we are all aware that 2015 was the WI centenary and events were organised around the country to celebrate this. On the 15 April the centenary baton came to Wantage.

The centenary baton had started its journey in LlanfairPG where the first WI meeting took place in 1915.  It travelled through all 69 WI Federations in the UK, ending its journey at the Annual Meeting in the Royal Albert Hall in June 2015.

An afternoon tea was held at the Wantage Museum, and Wantage WI took the opportunity to display their splendid new banner which was made by some of our members. Liz Dickins invited WI members to her home to watch the annual general meeting which was attended by the Queen. That is she attended the Royal Albert Hall and not Liz’s house party of course!

On the 2 June 2015 there was a Garden party at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the WI centenary, Jane Braithwaite and Jean Stirrup from Wantage WI were fortunate enough to be invited. The royal party consisted of Camilla Duchess of Cornwall, Sophie Countess of Wessex and Princess Alexandra.

On the 15 September there was a service at Christchurch Cathedral which called for another outing of the new banner, carried by Liz Dickins and Flora Hobden, accompanied by Eileen Webster Lesley Royan and Jan Abrahall.

The Craft-Coffee mornings have been well attended and a continued vehicle for existing and new members to get to know each other. The Charity Knitting continues to be led by Angie Bailey-Myers and Jill Vale, remaining popular with some terrific results. Providing hundreds of knitted items for several charities.

This year the 50/50 was divided between 2 bursaries of £120 and 4 cash prizes totaling £240.

I would like to thank Mary Lawrence for keeping a fabulous photographic record of our events and also Jean Stirrup for managing the website, which, without I would not have been able to put this report together.

I would like to thank all members who have contributed to the successful running of Wantage WI. Those of you who have set up the room and taken it down again. Those of you who have made the refreshments for the meeting and done the washing up. Those of you who have hosted coffee mornings and charity knitting. Those of you who have manned the door or made up the raffle prizes and to everyone for taking part and making us a very popular and friendly WI.

Diane Monnery

Secretary

10 March 2016