



## WI Annual Report to Parish Council

2nd April 2025

**Over the last year your local WI has offered a wide ranging programme of talks to its members and guests.**

In **April** members watched spellbound as Diana Mitchum produced a floral work of art. Diana uses only sustainable flowers & herbs. There are few flowers available in the winter so dried flowers must be used, twisted Hazel or Honesty for example. Roses imported from Kenya generate approximately 2.4kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per stem, compared to 0.2 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per stem for British ones.

In **May**, our expert speaker was Marie Christine Livage, a picture restorer. It was amazing to see a painting which appeared to be beyond saving restored by her through before & after photographs. Between the two images were hours of patient & meticulous work, carried out by an expert. An amazing skill.

Then in **June**, Robert & Patricia Newton, members of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Bell Ringers came to talk to us about their passion for bell ringing. They are regular ringers at All Saints, High Wycombe, where much work had to be carried out in the bell tower due to an infestation of Death Watch Beetle. New bells were commissioned and made by the Whitechapel Foundry, the longest running business in Britain.

During **July** the member's meeting was more energetic than we are used to. Thea Rogers started the evening to the strains of 'Night Fever' by the Bee Gees. Chairs were well spaced as arms and legs were thrown around in time to the music. Thea began her career teaching seated exercise classes in care homes but felt more was needed & so trained as a Zumba teacher. It was great fun.

Also in **July** we walked from Warborough to Benson Lock to see the annual Swan Upping. Arriving at the Waterfront cafe in time to see the King's Swan Marker, David Barber, floating towards us in a skiff, dressed in his colourful blazer and yachting cap. Checking the health of the swans on the river Thames has been an activity since the twelfth century. We watched as four cygnets, and their parents weighed and checked before being released back into the river seemingly unperturbed.

Our **August** meeting was held in Lynda Maclean's beautiful garden. A proper English tea was served, with sandwiches and homemade cakes. Weather was

typically English summer – warm with a shower of rain halfway through the afternoon.

Shelley Edwards from Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards was our speaker in **September** who spoke about scams and how to avoid them. A scam is fraud, and anyone can be a victim, even the most intelligent amongst us. Scammers have no scruples about who they abuse. Shelley advised that if you feel under pressure stop and make a cup of tea, this gives you space to think about what is happening. Then talk to a trusted friend or relative. Shelley gave us excellent advice and tips to avoid becoming a victim.

Susan Pfunder held our attention in **October**, with stories of ancient Peru and the successful reign of the Incas. Despite their domination of this country in the Andes they were wiped out by Spanish invaders. The Conquistadors never found Machu Picchu; it was hidden by the cloud forest. Unfortunately, the cloud forest has not stopped huge numbers of backpackers and tourists beating a trail to this Incan Citadel ever since it was discovered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally in **November** {after a year's delay due to filming} George MacGavin took to the stage. He delivered his talk 'It's a Wild Life: Tales from Television', it was serious, funny, informative and riveting. He used photographs and film to illustrate his point and was just hugely entertaining as well as educational. What a wonderful evening, thank you, George.

In **December** we hosted our Christmas party with games, wonderful food brought by our members, & wine. We raised over £100 for the charity SEE SAW which provides support for children who have been bereaved.

We started **January** with a talk from John Day, expert on Biogas installations, speaking positively, about developments in alternative power. In his talk entitled 'New Energy and Reducing your Carbon Footprint' John spoke about the company he works for which designs and installs Biogas operations, a way of generating power that is carbon neutral. Biogas installations generate power from waste, such as animal dung in agriculture, unwanted food from households and other organic waste products. This is placed in a digester where it is fermented. The end product is biogas or liquid hydrocarbons, which can be used to power equipment or drive vehicles. John's talk was full of science which some members found easier to understand than others - me included.

We all met at The George in Dorchester for our annual Celebration Dinner which is becoming a fixture in the WI Calendar in January. A fun evening was had by members and their guests.

Karen and Brett Wyles came in **February** to give their talk 'The WI: Not just Jam and Jerusalem'. They spoke about how the WI were essential to the war effort in World War 2. Not only were they responsible for organising the huge number of people who relocated to the safety of the countryside from cities, but they dealt with all the problems those evacuees caused. It was a WI report on the condition of evacuees which was instrumental in the setting up of the Family Allowance in 1946.

The WI were a pacifist organisation but although they could not work to support the war, they could support their country and did so in many different ways. They set up markets selling food their institutes had grown, vegetables, bread, eggs, jam, dairy products and poultry. They made toys for evacuees and orphans, camouflage nets for tanks & quilts for evacuees. They held knitting bees and produced over 22 million garments for servicemen & POWs. They collected plants such as digitalis for use in medicines. Provided school meals and helped with the meat pie scheme. They did also make jam, and bottled fruit & vegetables, preventing the bumper crop of 1941 from rotting by securing £1,400 (£27,000 in today's money) worth of sugar so WI volunteers could make jam. They supervised recycling of metal, paper, rags, rubber and bones, nothing was wasted. It seems this army of women were willing to volunteer for any role that needed women power and they aced it!

As members of today's WI, we continue to build on this legacy in a modern way.

Kim Tompsett

President.