



Inner Wheel D26 Newsletter March 2026



From District Chairman Jenny

Dear friends,

It has been a very interesting year and such a privilege to visit each club. The whole District came together for **Orange the World** and our efforts were very impressive in my opinion, with some great photos (see special page in addition to other photos from clubs). It is also very pleasing that so many clubs either raised funds or gifts (or both) for women's refuges or helplines, Despite dreadful potential weather warnings, the **coffee morning on 9th January** was packed and everyone had a good time (see report from Linda Russel).

My visits have demonstrated to me how much friendship to members and great service to the communities we give. Clubs are so welcoming. Their programmes are packed with interesting speakers, visits and projects to support their communities. The venues and degree of formality can be quite different. I'm really looking forward to continuing these visits.

The Executive Committee are well aware of the problems some members are having with rising costs and difficulties in driving which prevents some members from attending District Meetings regularly. We have been trying for years to get this better- although we cannot ever please everyone. The things we have managed to do are:

*Hold each meeting in a different venue around our area

*This year all meetings are in the daytime to avoid night driving.

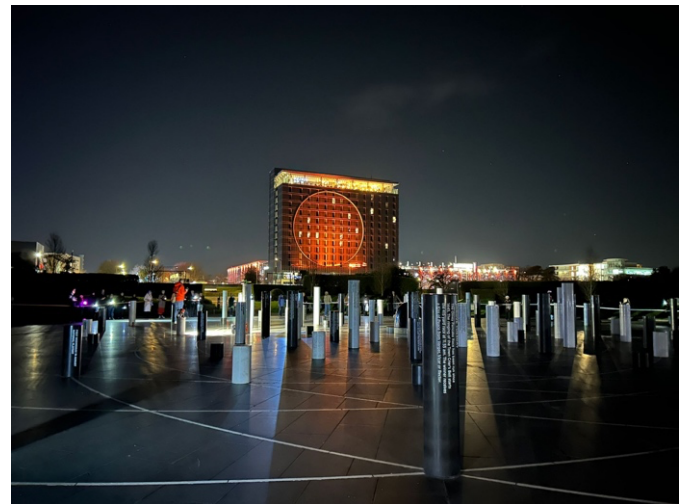
*We have reduced meetings by combining the Rally and autumn District Meeting.

We will put further proposals to reduce the number of lunch meetings and thus the costs; and also to reduce the formality and business admin, which we will bring to the March meeting for group discussion. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible then.

With best wishes

Jenny

Orange the World 25th Nov-10th Dec Events in D26



Milton Keynes lit up in orange



Luton Women's Refuge



Ware Sainsbury's



Newport Pagnell



Dunstable



Luton Town Centre



Harpenden Waitrose food collection



Ware lunch party



Amphill Goody bags.



M K Shopping Centre
Wolverton



Newport Pagnell
Postbox



Luton North yarnbombers

International Inner Wheel Day Coffee Morning 9th January.



Lucy Lewis with Brenda Lowe

District 26 celebrated IW Day at The Vale Hotel in Luton. The event was supported by 10 clubs and 57 members. Sadly, the bad weather meant that several people were unable to come along. However, we received a warm welcome from the hotel staff who were very helpful throughout the morning.

District Chairman Jenny welcomed everyone before handing over to Brenda Lowe. Brenda thanked Isobel Wilkinson for making the wonderful cake to celebrate D26's 40th Anniversary.



Cutting the cake were representatives of 3 clubs celebrating 'special' birthdays this year- Ware- 80 years old (Jenny Horlock), Letchworth Garden City- 75 years old (Lynne Farr) and Berkhamsted Bulbourne -40 years old (Mel Funnell)



We were then served warm scones with clotted cream and jam, followed by a slice of the delicious cake made by Isobel.

Brenda introduced the speaker, Lucy Lewis, who was the UK's first woman to operate as a bomb disposal officer.

Lucy told us that she joined the Army in 1989 with a hangover and an ironing board. By the time she left the army she was on her seventh ironing board because ironing is an essential skill in the army. During her time, she travelled all over the world. She told us that real life bomb disposal is nothing like the Hollywood depiction of merely cutting the correct coloured wire to defuse a bomb.

As a woman, Lucy was taught special social skills, including what to wear and when to leave functions. Women were told never to wear tights but should instead wear stockings and suspender belts. Certain events called for her wearing 6 or more pairs of knickers including thongs, lacy pants, gym pants complete with a pocket for a hanky and even a pair of pantomime bloomers. Games are an important part of social events as women are expected to be 'good sports'. Wearing several pairs of knickers was essential at a party game whereby the two youngest male recruits had to swap places with each other while sitting at either end of a very long table. The winner of the game was the first recruit to sit in the opposing place wearing a pair of ladies knickers on his head.

Lucy had to do a bomb disposal course with the TA and whilst crawling through a minefield, tried to defuse a bomb which turned out to be a cow pat. She was called Captain Cowpat for several years afterwards. Lucy later transferred to the Royal Military Police.

Lucy eventually left the Army to settle down and raise a family. Later she became Cambridge University's first woman marshal in its 809-year history. The University Marshal is one of a trio of ceremonial mace bearers at the University.

Lucy's talk was extremely interesting and full of amusing anecdotes, and we all thoroughly enjoyed it. Brenda Lowe gave the Vote of Thanks.

The raffle in aid of the midwifery bursary was a great success raising £268. A further £20 was made by selling pots of delicious home-made jam.

Jenny Versey closed the proceedings by thanking us again for coming and wishing us a safe journey home.

If anyone would like to read about Lucy's career, she has written a book entitled 'Lighting the Fuse'
From Linda Russell.

From the Clubs

Dunstable

Orange the World was very much in our thoughts before Christmas. We modelled our Orange Hats on Dunstable Downs on a cold and windy morning and also decorated a Christmas Tree at Dunstable Priory Church with an orange theme.



A lively Coffee morning in early December was spent making up bags of toiletries which were forwarded to a local Women's Refuge. More knitted hats for babies were also taken to Luton and Dunstable Hospital.

We were all pleased to see Father Christmas at our December meeting and in January we started the New Year with a Bring and Buy Sale and a Quiz about flowers. Our friend John Buckledee was our speaker in February when he entertained us with his wide knowledge of the history of Dunstable. At the same meeting we brought together specified items brought by members to be part of a collection organised by the Priory Church which is going on a lorry to Ukraine.

Berkhamsted Bulbourne

The Inner Wheel elves were out in force in December assisting Santa with collections for local Rotary and Inner Wheel charities. Pictured here are Susan Brown and Jo White, from among a team who helped out collecting during the day outside Waitrose in Berkhamsted. They raised a magnificent £1,088 in one day.



Last summer, following the end of a very successful year with Mel Furnell-Jones as President, the club was able to donate an amazing £5630 to her chosen charity of the year: Parkinsons UK. To present the cheque to local Parkinson's UK organiser Sarah Jones, members of the Berkhamsted Bulbourne committee got together in Mel's garden to celebrate the success of the fundraising efforts. Many events took place over the year to accumulate this grand sum including a wonderful garden tea party in Mel's garden which raised over £1000, support from Mel's husband David (pictured below) who raised a substantial amount in a 'Santa Beard Grow' last Autumn, collections from the local fireworks display and from the Santa Sleigh and a raffle at the Fellowship evening.



(Apologies for leaving this last item out in last newsletter)

Ware



Orange Lunch

Christine and Barrie hosted an orange lunch at their house on 25th November after we had done our stint at advertising at Hertford Sainsbury, and the proceeds went to Hertford Women's Refuge.



Our Christmas celebration, with partners included a local choir (to which some of our members belong) singing carols.



On Inner Wheel Day, Karin hosted a lunch to raise money for The Dust Project. Charlotte Boulton gave an update on the progress in Sri Lanka. The February meeting was our International themed meeting to which we invited guests from other clubs. Peter Dowse gave a talk on Shelterbox and our raffle raised funds for this cause which is

International Officer Karin's other chosen charity for the year.

Luton North

We celebrated Orange the World, starting with a walk through the town in our orange tabards and orange hats. We were joined by the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Susan Lousada, District Chairman Jenny, Stepping Stones, Azalea, Woman's Aid and the police. We handed out leaflets explaining about it and carried placards. We finished at the Town Hall, where we had a banner displayed. We then went in for a welcome cup of tea.



Outside the Town Hall

A few days later we walked through Wardown Park in our orange things. We then had an Advent Orange Lunch, where we tried to make all the food orange. After lunch we packed pamper bags, as we do every Christmas for unpaid carers. These were well received at the Young at Heart Cafe. This year President Meryl wanted to give some to Stepping Stones too, as that is her charity this year. We did of course do an Orange themed post box topper, before changing it in December to our Christmas one!



Ampthill & District



President Diane and some members fundraising for our charities at Flitwick Church Village Hall

Ampthill and District supported Orange the World by donating goodies to our local Woman's Refuge, (see picture on page 3)
We also decorated the Christmas tree with orange pompoms that we entered for St Andrew's tree festival



Buckingham

What a busy time our club has had over the past few months!

In October our guest speaker was the lovely Cerus who runs and owns Cerus Botanical Designs Floral Artistry. Not for the first time did she amaze us with her 'effortless' demonstrations and some of our members even attended her Christmas wreath workshops, said these wreaths took pride of place on many front doors.

We held another successful soup lunch, which was so popular we are holding another one at the end of February (28th).
Music Bingo was also fully booked.
President Glynis and Secretary Jean attended the Remembrance Day parade and laid a wreath which had been made by member Margaret Jarvis (mother of Cerus)
For 'Orange The World', from the 25th Nov – 10th Dec, various members walked around town wearing assorted items in orange. There were a few enquiries regarding their attire and they quite happily explained, what we as an association, were trying to achieve.
We had stalls at 5 craft fairs, made and sold refreshments at both the Community Centre and Buckingham Christmas parade.
For Inner Wheel Day, we visited a local care home and took along some biscuits and chocolates. Unfortunately, we were more members than residents, but we all had a very enjoyable few hours, and have been asked to visit again.
We've also had very interesting speakers in the form of Llewelyn from The Well Retreat and James from Retina UK.

Hitchin

In October Barbara Pennicott, one of our members, gave us a very interesting talk about a banner which she and six others had quilted in recognition of the boys who had attended Hitchin British School and who had died in World War 1. It was a beautiful piece of embroidery with the names of 68 boys sewn onto it. 64 had been soldiers and 4 were sailors, the youngest was 18 and the oldest 41. It now hangs in the British Schools Museum in Hitchin, and she is quite rightfully very proud of it.



Newport Pagnell

Back in November we held two charity fund raising events raising £1,000 towards our President's charity: Ride High (an equestrian centre in Milton Keynes which supports vulnerable young people). The first was a very successful Christmas Fayre with Festive Tea and Christmas gift stall in Olney, catering for approx. 70 people, and for the second we had a stall at the switch-on of the Christmas Lights in Newport Pagnell.

At our October meeting, members enjoyed a lovely afternoon creating autumnal floral arrangements using foliage collected from their gardens and on walks.



To raise awareness of the UN's Orange the World campaign, on 25 November members split into two groups, each visiting the High Streets of Newport Pagnell and Olney. They distributed posters to health centres, libraries, council offices and hairdressers, gave out leaflets to shoppers and explained how IW were supporting such an important campaign. The craft group created a special topper which was displayed on the post box in Wordsworth Avenue, Newport Pagnell, and two Christmas trees were decorated in 'orange' for Tree Festivals in churches at Olney and Newport Pagnell.



President Sue Grady with Claire Lunnon

At the January meeting, the speaker was Claire Lunnon from the Garden House Hospice in Letchworth. Claire told members about her work coordinating fund-raising to keep the hospice going. She certainly seems to have the whole community working for her. Inner Wheel are involved in knitting 'Charlie's chicks' which President Sue handed over to Claire. They have many other sources of knitted chicks which are stuffed with chocolate eggs for sale. They have a chick-stuffing day when volunteers stuff the chicks and finish them off with eyes, noses, hats, etc, so that each chick is different. They then package them into boxes of 25 which go to all the schools in the area for sale. Last year £22,500 was raised for the Hospice through this whole community enterprise



The club is holding a soup lunch for Mary's meals in February



Last October, one of our members relocated to Singapore with her husband for six months. While there, Sophie contacted the IW club of Singapore Central and attended some of their meetings, and in November joined the club in their support of the OTW campaign.



Our speaker in January was a local River Warden who gave an interesting overview of his work as a volunteer, and afterwards we celebrated our 49th anniversary with delicious cakes made by our President!

Harpenden Village

During our October meeting Sally Milligan from the Ataxia Telangiectasia Society talked to us about this rare, complex and progressive genetic disorder. All the income of the AT Society comes from fundraising and grants, so we were pleased to make a donation.



On 5th December, as part of Orange the World, Harpenden Waitrose very kindly allowed us to set up outside their front and back entrances between 10.00am and 12.00 noon. We gave leaflets to shoppers explaining that we were making a collection of suggested items for St Albans and Hertsmere Women's Refuge. We were amazed at the response and generosity shown by the people of Harpenden, making this a very worthwhile morning.



Letchworth Garden City

For 'Orange the World' Letchworth Garden City club organized a coffee morning event, open to the public, to offer information and support to any woman, or girl, needing help. Officers from Stevenage Police station, who work directly with the local communities were present, together with members of the Fire and Rescue teams. The young mayor of Stevenage took time out from school to attend, as did her deputy and they spent some quality 1-1 time with staff who they

promptly invited to come and talk to their fellow students at school. A group of about 30 students from Stevenage college arrived and were pleased to have their knowledge boosted given that they were studying various aspects of the affects of violence on women and girls as part of their Health and Social Care courses. The Police licensing Officer gave everyone valuable information on how to stay safe over the Christmas period when out celebrating and an officer from the Fire and Rescue team described how best to get out of a car when it is being driven by someone you come to regard as dangerous.



Wolverton

For Orange the World we put orange and white bunting all around Wolverton Town Hall, placed a topper on the post box in the Tesco store, manned a kiosk in the Centre MK and supported the main events in Milton Keynes by making toppers for the pillars at MK Rose and taking part in the vigil. We held a soup and pudding lunch, with the money raised going to the Women's refuge. So, all in all, we managed to elevate the Inner Wheel profile whilst making people aware of the part we are playing to help stop violence against women.

At the end of November, we held our customary stall at the Stony Stratford Christmas Lights Fair. The morning dawned dark and wet and those members setting up the stall were completely SOAKED! Fortunately, the day improved and from 11.00am onwards we managed to sell all our perishable goods and most of our jams, chutneys, and home-made

craft items before the official lights switch-on.

From mid-December to Christmas Eve, we helped Wolverton & Stony Stratford Rotary Club with their sleigh collections. A great thing to support, if only to see the delight on children's faces when they have a chat with Santa!

It wasn't all work though, as mid-December we had our Christmas lunch at the Warbler in the Wharf, when it was our turn to sit down and be waited on!

2026 got off to a great start with our January meeting being held at our President's home; lots of chatter and catching up to do after Christmas!

On 7 February, along with Buckingham and Newport Pagnell clubs, we helped with the Essence of Audrey afternoon tea at the Chrysalis Theatre in Milton Keynes, raising funds for the Camphill Community.

Our next Fun event will be a quiz on the 21 February at Medbourne Pavilion with all profits going to Harry's Rainbow.

Buckingham, Newport Pagnell and Wolverton Inner Wheel Clubs

The Essence of Audrey

A captivating play, written and performed by Helen Anker, exploring the life and legacy of the iconic actress and humanitarian, Audrey Hepburn.

One day last summer our Inner Wheel Choir (Buckingham, Newport Pagnell and Wolverton) met at the Camphill Community. For those of you who may not

know about Camphill in Milton Keynes, it was founded in 1981 and provides support and a meaningful working life for adults with a wide range of learning disabilities. The residents help in the bakery, café and gardens, in a safe and stimulating environment. They have their very own Theatre, which seats 200 people and has all the necessary lighting and sound equipment to put on a variety of performances.

Following the very successful Essence of Audrey performance District held at Silsoe Village Hall during the summer of 2024, I thought the Chrysalis Theatre would be a great venue to air this show again.

I knew that Camphill was trying to raise funds to build more accommodation for future residents. As John and Muriel, our choir leaders, were both very involved with Camphill - John being a trustee, I put the idea of The Essence of Audrey to them.

To get the Inner Wheel name out there and to raise our profile, we then approached the Camphill fundraising team to see if they would like to do a joint venture with Inner Wheel, raising funds for their building project, whilst promoting us.

Our three Inner Wheel clubs set up a small working party with Carolyn and Chris from the Camphill team and we began making plans. It was agreed to have afternoon tea following Helen's performance, which Inner Wheel prepared. Tickets were sold via the Camphill website, and all the 120 tickets were sold out before the end of January. Several people had been disappointed to miss the performance, so it was then decided to open a few seats in the balcony at a reduced price but without the afternoon tea.

The event turned out to be a huge success and raised over £3,000 for the Camphill building fund. We are now thinking about another event there, but we'll take a rest for a month or two before we start planning again!

Judith. (District M & D rep.)



Luton Chiltern



There is a lot of "orange" in this report. Some of us gathered to celebrate UN Orange the World on November 25th. We walked in Houghton Hall Park wearing our orange hi viz tabards and waving banners and flags. It was

a cold day so a hot drink was very necessary at the park's coffee shop. We even managed to pose next to an orange car in the car park!

Our November Club meeting found our presidents Roly and Denise multi-tasking. They presented several boxes and bags of suitable gifts for women and children admitted to the Luton Women's' refuge. All the boxes were wrapped in orange and the gifts selected by our members. These were presented to a representative from Luton Womens' Aid, Wai Bing Hui. Our presidents had already selected this charity before knowing Inner Wheel's choice of Orange the World. A very happy coincidence. Under Roly and Denise's instruction our members made some very pretty Christmas cards during the same meeting. More orange gits in the background.



Dates for the Future

Thursday March 12th District Meeting
Aubrey Park Hotel, Hemel Hempstead Rd,
Redbourn, St Albans.AL3 7AF.
Coffee served from 10.30 am
District Meeting 11-12noon
Lunch @ 12.30 pm
Speaker: Trish Beaven & Leanne Shaw
from the St Albans and Hertsmere
Women's Refuge.

23rd-25th March - Association Conference Llandudno

Those who have booked for Conference will have their Conference programmes by now. Unfortunately District Chairman Barbara of D9 has been unable to find a venue for a joint D9 & D26 meet-up on Monday Night, and I am sure some clubs may have booked their own get-together.

But please let me know if you would like me to book some restaurant for D26 members with nowhere else booked up.

Thursday 26th June, District Meeting and AGM. Holiday Inn, Milton Keynes. Details TBA

This will be a daytime event this year (already booked) and we will see how it goes. But we are considering in another year(2027) having a separate zoom meeting for business and an afternoon tea for the Handover. Your views are welcomed

**STEP UP
&
LEAD** *by*
EXAMPLE

International theme 2025-2026

Thank you for all your contributions to this newsletter

Jenny Versey. Newsletter editor.

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