



The Association of Inner Wheel Clubs in Great Britain & Ireland

A Brief History of Inner Wheel

Inner Wheel – A 95 year Journey continues

From its very beginnings Friendship and Service have always been at the heart of Inner Wheel.

With the devastating effects of war still very much in evidence and obvious inequality across the classes, wives of Manchester Rotarians met, on the 15th November 1923, for the purpose of setting up a ladies' club to run along Rotary lines.

Over the years since Rotary International had spread to Britain, with virtually no welfare or social services available for those in need, Rotary Clubs had endeavoured to do all they could to help alleviate the suffering of those around them, regularly involving their wives, who would form a committee then, once the project had been completed, disband until they were once again called upon to help.

However, unknown to each another, in various parts of the country, some of these unofficial groups with a variety of names, having enjoyed the friendship that working together engendered, stayed together, often initiating further service on their own account, with social events organised and speakers invited to entertain and inform.

To this end, the meeting in Manchester, was held at Heriott's Turkish Baths in Deansgate, chosen as the venue, as [Mrs Golding](#) later admitted naively, because it was the only room they could get for nothing!

The 27 ladies present learned that the object of the club was to be twofold: firstly to foster friendship between the wives of Rotarians and secondly, without encroaching on the prerogatives of the men, widen their opportunities of service, which official club status would give them. With Mrs Margarette Golding as Chairman and Mrs Mabel Nixon taking on the dual role of Secretary/Treasurer, a temporary committee was formed, to take on the administrative duties and find a suitable meeting place.

Eager to progress, by the time of their next meeting, on 10th January 1924, (now celebrated annually as World Inner Wheel Day throughout the world), funds had been raised and 80 woollen baby garments knitted and delivered to St Mary's Hospital, in time for Christmas. At this meeting, held at the Social Club, Lower Mosley Street, now the site of The Bridgewater Hall, Mrs Golding was elected as President, rather than Chairman; Mrs Nixon as Secretary/Treasurer and because Rotary International's declared policy would not allow the use of 'Rotary', as the minutes show, 'After considerable discussion', the rules of the club were resolved and "The Inner Wheel Club of Manchester" name duly adopted, creating a firm foundation and ingeniously indicating the Rotary connection.

Membership grew steadily and had doubled within the year, but the influence of the Manchester Club, lay not only in its active charitable work locally, but in its vigorous help in the formation of other clubs, until in 1928 Margarett Golding, a lady very much ahead of her time, put before the Manchester Club a proposal, with far reaching consequences, that steps should be taken to unite all women's clubs, existing alongside Rotary Clubs.

The Inner Wheel Club of Liverpool was approached and following a joint meeting, a committee was formed to make arrangements for a Ladies' Meeting, to be held at the forthcoming Rotary District Conference, in Llandudno - 'with the approval of No 5 District (Rotary) – who have been most sympathetic and helpful in the matter.' – laying the basis, for the acceptance of standard rules; exchange of information about service and other projects and above all the inspiration of belonging to the same body as women in other places, serving the same cause and the formation of the soon to be called 'No 5 Inner Wheel District Committee. Other Districts were formed, taking the geographical area and number of their corresponding Rotary District, their aim to unite all Inner Wheel Clubs in their location and encourage the formation of new clubs.

By the end of 1932 with the number of Districts steadily growing, the need for a central organisation was being mooted and the proposal to form a central organisation was approved. Mrs Golding was elected President and Mrs Nixon Secretary of an interim committee empowered to draw up a constitution and bye-laws within the year, so that during the RIBI Conference in Douglas, Isle of Man, on May 6th 1934, the draft rules were presented at the Inner Wheel Business Meeting and 'The Association of Inner Wheel Clubs in Great Britain and Ireland' came into being.

From those early days in Manchester, there are currently 568 clubs in Great Britain & Ireland, divided into 29 Districts and with approximately 14,000 members. [View our district pages.](#)

Embracing the object of International Understanding, International Inner Wheel ([IIW](#)) was formed in 1967. Active in 104 countries, with 108,000 members in 3,895 clubs, it is one of the largest women's voluntary organisations in the world, and has representation at the United Nations.

Bibliography: Home and Horizon by Millicent Gaskell; Inner Wheel A History by Jay French; Friendship through Service by Kathleen Hovey