**THE HISTORY OF SI ABERDEEN (1950 – 1970)**

In 1950 Doctor Mary Esslemont, a gynaecologist at the city’s free Dispensary, well known for her work with the city’s poor and disadvantaged and as an activist for women’s rights, became club president. She had been the first woman to sit on the committee, along with Aneurin Bevan, who negotiated with the government on the development of the National Health Service. Despite her many other commitments she gave a great deal of her time to Soroptimism, ultimately becoming Federation President. During her club presidential year donations were made to the British Empire Cancer Research Fund and the Boy Scouts Appeal. As a result of club members’ concerns regarding the lack of aftercare for ex-patients, Dr Esslemont, along with member Margaret Fulton, the first qualified occupational therapist to be employed in Britain, formed the Amity Club where women could socialise while also using skills learned during their stay in care. Club members supported this venture by paying the rent of club rooms and craft materials and helping at weekly meetings and social events. The Amity club continued for fifteen years.

The Scottish Conference was held for the first time in Aberdeen in 1953, and the following year the club celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, raising funds for the celebration with a garden party. During the next few years organisations to benefit from donations were the Lord Provost’s Flood Disaster Relief Fund, the Ferryhill Home for Children, the Navy League and Merchant Navy Schools, the King George VI Memorial Fund, Save the Children and the Federation Benevolent Fund. Walking frames for disabled children and climbing frames for the Deaf School were also funded. Between 1956 and 1959 members attended the International Convention in New York, the national conference in Torquay, the Scottish conference and the Federation conference in Blackpool. Funds were also raised for the Red Cross, the Soroptimist Refugee Fund, the Lord Provost’s Refugee Fund and the Children’s Shelter.

By 1962 the club was able to donate £50, the equivalent of more than £1000 today, to the Friends of Glenburn Wing for a lifetime subscription. That year the Federation Conference was held in Aberdeen, and donations were made to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, the Victoria Lodging House and the Samaritans. In 1964 the club’s summer outing was cancelled due to the typhoid outbreak. In the mid sixties donations were made to the Abbeyfield Housing Society and the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Another project that received support from the club was the sponsoring of a Thai girl, Phophien (Poppy) Vejjubul, for her nurse training in Aberdeen. At this time the club was invited to become a friendship link with SI Kuopio in Finland, a link which remains today.

The highlight of 1969 was the club’s 40th anniversary dinner and throughout the club year members heard talks on subjects including the Suffragette movement, the Tall Ships race and ‘Growing Old in the 70s’! Members were also asked to donate to the Federation Golden Jubilee Fund. During that same year a group of high-ranking Soroptimists toured Scotland. There were thirty-seven in all including nine nationalities. They were entertained in the north east by north Scotland clubs including SI Aberdeen. The party included Soroptimist International President from Sweden, and three past SI presidents, the Vice President of SI Americas, President of SIGBI (Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland) and several other office bearers. In 1970 beneficiaries included Linn Moor Home and Marie Curie, and support continued for the Victoria Lodging House.