**THE HISTORY OF SI ABERDEEN (1929 -1950)**

The Soroptimist International of Aberdeen club (SI Aberdeen) was chartered in 1929, was the third to be established in Scotland and the seventh in Great Britain. Beginning in California in 1921 Soroptimism started at a time when women were becoming aware of their potential, both in the workplace and the community at large. The fundamental ideals of those early days – the right to work, equal opportunities of employment, the status of women, and international understanding between women- had great appeal not only in the United States but also further afield in Europe and Great Britain.

A founder member and first president of SI Aberdeen (1929- 1930) was Fanny Cromar Bruce, a journalist who had previously worked in Canada. During the first years of the club most of the financial outgoings related to hiring meeting rooms, secretarial and travelling expenses and an annual dinner.

Within a few years of its founding the club had achieved recognition in the city. Whilst acts of service involved raising money for worthy causes members also gave time to do voluntary work. In 1933 the club helped to publicise the plight of families with young children who were being forced to live in tents because they had nowhere else. The publicity resulted in all the families being housed by the local council within a couple of weeks. During 1934 club donations went to the Indigent Gentlewomen’s Sale of Work, the Maternity Hospital Building Fund, and to the “Willing Shilling” Fund. The club was described at that time by its president as, “past the teething stage but still pre-school age”.

In 1935, under the presidency of Mary Mackie the club started providing Christmas food parcels for the elderly and needy, and this continued for more than thirty years. On her death Mary left a legacy to the club. In 1936, the national Soroptimist conference was held in Aberdeen and was deemed to have been very successful. By the outbreak of the Second World War the club had ongoing service projects but additional effort was required to set up and sustain new projects to alleviate the hardships of wartime. During the early war years many donations were given by the club to organisations such as the Jewish Refugees’ Fund, the International Peace Campaign and the Soroptimist Austrian Refugee Fund. Support continued for the Aberdeen Maternity Hospital. Club members attended a meeting of the Peace Committee of the League of Nations Union and a series of First Aid lectures. A local trawler, HMS Manor, was adopted by the club and a comfort fund was established to provide parcels of food and clothing. Nationally, support was given to raising funds for ambulances for the troops. During the early forties monies continued to be raised for war related causes including donations to soldiers’ teas and cigarettes, the Red Cross, Prisoner of War Fund and local hospitals as well as to the local Mother and Baby Home.

In 1945 money was raised for the Federation Fund for Post War Relief in Europe, the French Children’s Fund and for the local St Clair’s Home for Girls New Building Fund. Regular visits from members were made in connection with the Sailors’, Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Families Association. At this time the club had seventy five members and a meeting had to be postponed as it coincided with VE Day! That same year the club president attended the Soroptimist conference in London where delegates from European countries gave details of their lives in occupied countries. At a conference in Edinburgh earlier that year a colleague had remarked to the club president, “How fortunate the Aberdeen club is – you always seem to work so happily and pull so well together”.

Following the war years, the pattern of giving help and service continued. Between 1946 and 1948 club members sponsored a huge effort to raise funds for Homes for Old People. The amount raised was in excess of £3,300, more than a third, £1,300, which was the direct result of members’ efforts alone. The equivalent sums today would be around £85,000 and £33,000. In 1948 fifteen new members joined the club increasing the membership to eighty-four. During the next few years donations were made to the Shiprow Tavern, the Good Companions’ Club for the Deaf and the Old People’s Welfare Council. Continued support was given to the St Clair Home for Girls.