



Chartered 1961

The inaugural meeting of Soroptimist International of Blackpool was held on Thursday 4th May 1961 in Blackpool and attended by 21 members who elected **Margaret Richardson** as the club's first President. Subscriptions were set at £3.3s.0d. The club still meets on a Thursday and in its 60 years the club has installed 46 Presidents, some serving several terms, and subscriptions have risen over the 60 years to £115. Reflecting the wider geographic area from which the membership is drawn the club changed its name to **Soroptimist International of Blackpool and District** in 2011.

To date the club has supported 145 individual charities, local, national and international; one of the first recorded charities supported by the club was Girl Guiding which the membership still supports. The club has also raised sufficient funds to train and donate two hearing dogs for the deaf. Four members of the club have held the office of Regional President (formerly known as Divisional Union) and one member has held the office of Federation President. Two joining members have also been DU Presidents.

Members who have received National Honours during the 60 years;



Christine Fairhurst

Margaret Parr - MBE 1998

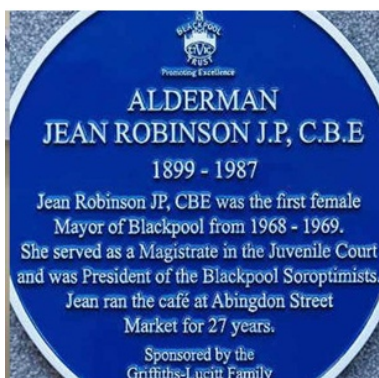
Doris Salisbury - OBE 1980

Jean Robinson - CBE

Jo Darbyshire D.L. Deputy Lieutenant 2007

M. Gascoigne - Imperial Service Medal 1972

Christine Fairhurst - Imperial Service Medal 2015



Several members have been appointed to positions as the first woman in their field, **Jean Robinson** was elected as the first woman Mayor of Blackpool in 1968 and a Blue Plaque to commemorate this achievement is on Abingdon Street in Blackpool. Other firsts include **Ruth Morrison**, the first woman to hold the position of Chief Inspector of Police in Lancashire 1983, **Margaret Hamer** the first woman to be Chairman of the Blackpool Magistrate's Bench in 1973, **Diane Parker** appointed as the first woman chaplain at Blackpool Victoria Hospital in 1983.

Members have given Service to many local organisations and charities throughout its 60 years. The longest of these is Talking News, a recorded reading service for the local Blind Society, now known as N-Vision. A team of 4 readers and a technician has made regular recordings (now monthly) since the Talking News project began in 1977, a total of 44 years of continuous service. Members also purchased a new recording table and microphones for Talking News in 1988. The club provided a team for the local Child Contact Centre Service to enable a separated parent to meet their children in a neutral and safe environment. This service was given from 1998 to the closure of the centre in 2015.



Members recording the Talking Newspaper

In the 1980s many SI clubs here and abroad created funds to open and run houses for single women. The Blackpool club was no exception and formed a separate housing company under the Friendly Societies Act of 1875. They were rewarded in their early efforts by a gift through a bequest of 4 houses which were beneficially let with 1 vacant. The vacant house was sold by auction and the tenants of the other 3 houses continued to live in their homes with the beneficial support from SI Blackpool. The houses have been sold over the years as the properties became vacant and we now have the freehold of 2 unassuming and anonymous properties for the purpose of Women's Refuges for Victims of Domestic Violence. These were purchased in 1994 and 2007. The club is proud that in our 60th year the Refuges provide an invaluable service in the local area. We also support Fylde Coast Women's Aid, who manage the properties on a day to day basis, by maintaining a reserve fund in our housing company to support the maintenance and development of the houses. Members also support the refuges by making an annual collection of items that will be of use to the women and their children. Each member of

the club holds one share in the Housing Company. Our Service to the community was honoured and recognised when the club received The Local Hero's Award in 2019; the award was presented at an evening event in the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool.



Collection of household cleaning items for women setting up their own home following a stay in the Refuge

Christine Walker, an optician, joined our club in 1987. She was club President in 1993-94 and made an Honorary Member in 2008. Christine suffered from Multiple Sclerosis but remained a member until her death in 2011. Christine left the club a bequest and instructions to use the funds for the benefit of SI Blackpool and District and its work with charitable organisations. Charities that have benefitted from the legacy include Children of Watamu Happy House, PIES (Partners in Education in Swaziland), Kilgrimol Guide Centre, Autism Initiative, Kirkham and Wesham Scouts, Life Education, Windmill Youth Group, The Carers Trust.

In 2019 the club made the first of five annual awards from the legacy fund to a female student at the Blackpool Sixth Form College who would go on to study a STEM subject - science, technology, engineering, mathematics-at University. The Award is for £500 per year.

Programme Action work is at the heart of the club's activities and these include lobbying MPs and local Councillors about issues that concern women e.g., trafficking and modern day slavery. We improve our environment by beach cleaning and the club is currently looking at ways that members can actively make a difference to help limit Climate Change. The club hosted the United Nations Gift box in Blackpool for 3 days in 2017 and this raised awareness of trafficking and modern day slavery in the town.

The club was awarded the Regional Darwen Shield in 2009 for the purchase of the second Women's Refuge and again in 2016 for hosting the United Nations Gift Box in Blackpool, highlighting and publicising this difficult topic.

Recently the charities Blackpool Carers, Red Box Project, Plan International and Toilet Twinning have benefitted from members' support. The Toilet Twinning project also involved placing plaques in 8 high profile venues locally. The plaques raised awareness not only of the Toilet Twinning Scheme but also of the work of Soroptimist International.



Toilet Twinning Plaque

Currently the club has 28 members, the youngest member being 18 when she joined the club in 2017 and who is now studying at University. She maintains contact with the club and is involved with our activities when at home. Using her expertise in social media we have a vibrant Facebook page. To promote Soroptimism and the club we operate stands at local venues and to attract new members we have designed a "goody bag" with pen, notebook, bookmark and a leaflet with club details. The SI logo and the club name are emblazoned on the bag and the contents. The club is actively engaged in meeting potential new members and welcoming them to meetings.

Our members enjoy "fun and friendship" by attending meetings and social events including dinners and lunches, meeting other Soroptimists and taking part in numerous activities and challenges. The Regional Rosebowl competition in 2018 challenged every club to learn something new together. The club decided to learn to sign a song and joined the Blackpool Signing Choir. We learned to sign the song "Love Changes Everything" for the competition and **SI Blackpool and District** went on to win the Rosebowl for the first time in the history of the competition. **Margaret Parr**, who transferred to Blackpool in 2004 when SI Fleetwood closed, instigated the Regional Rosebowl competition when she was DU President in 1979-80 to encourage more interaction between the regional clubs. She also donated the trophy. Margaret was delighted when invited to present the Rosebowl to the club. Several members continue to attend and perform with the Signing Choir.



Presentation of the Regional Rosebowl 2018

The Coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has impacted every part of our daily lives and being a Soroptimist club member is no exception. Our usual meeting place, Blackpool North Shore Golf Club, closed the venue in March 2020 at the start of lockdown so in true Soroptimist spirit we arranged Zoom Business and Executive meetings and social events for members until the easing of lockdown restrictions. Members kept busy and collected toys, books and games for local schools to distribute to children and their families struggling during lockdown; knitted squares to make in to blankets for the Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia. A member was involved in the local organisation of making scrubs for the hospital and others helped to make masks, sold in aid of the hospice. The club's communications team published and edited a monthly newsletter, Seaside News, to keep members who are not on-line up to date and informed (see sample below) and also acts as publicity for potential new members.

Looking forward to the future and the club's 60th birthday and 100 years of Soroptimism in 2021 is challenging in this ever changing new world. To celebrate these 2 milestones we plan to provide a Chatty Bench in Stanley Park, Blackpool, plant a garden along the sea front and a planned Blackpool Illumination tram ride will raise money for the Women's Refuges. The club moves forward with Soroptimist values at its core. With access to the club Whats App, Twitter and Facebook and the web site to promote ourselves we aim to have a brilliant future built on a long and fascinating history.



Seasider News

from
Soroptimist International Blackpool & District

Women inspiring action
transforming lives

Editor - **Norma Parry**



Like many service and social organisations, local women's group, SI Blackpool & District have suspended all activities through the Covid-19 lockdown, but have been busy behind the scenes.



Janet Goodwin is the newly elected as the Club President and her charities for the coming year will embrace Blue Skies Fund for Blackpool Teaching Hospitals and also Mercy Ships (mercyships.org.uk) providing medical care for the underserved in Africa.

Retiring from office after eight years as Club Secretary, Su Gordon made her final duty the administration and co-ordination of the electronic AGM, which all went without a hitch. The new Club Secretary is Pam Swain who like Janet, works in the field of dentistry.

Outgoing President Catherine Shevlin's charity, Plan International (plan-uk.org) which works in 75 countries to advance children's rights and equality for girls, keeping them safe, has benefitted from £1,000 raised by a full diary of events. One of these being a "Curry Night" at Catherine's home where members enjoyed the food, which was cooked by Catherine's mum.



FORTHCOMING CLUB EVENT

A Virtual Quiz via ZOOM
to be held in July (date to be decided)
on the subject of

FAMOUS WOMEN

Entry Fee £1 (to be collected when we meet again)
plus

Bring along your Favourite Tipple
(and tell everyone what is is)

This Newsletter is a new departure for our club, and the communications team are aiming to try and make it a monthly item - but we need your help!

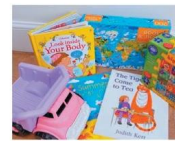
We would like to share your news - so let us know what you have been doing during lockdown. Have you been working in or for the community?

Have you got news of any members who may not have been able to share in the virtual meetings held on ZOOM.

Please share your news with Norma on 07870 593228 or email: normaparry18@gmail.com

Programme work is still continuing with:

- * Members are continuing to knit blanket squares for the Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia.
- * Collections of Spectacles for Vision Aid - via Specsavers.
- * Collections of Bras for "Smalls for All" charity.
- * Collections of toys, puzzles and games to be given out by schools to children during the Lockdown. Many thanks to Jean Priestley who collected the bags from Marcia and delivered them to St Kentigern's School.



For more information on any of the above items please contact Marcia

A reminder for those who have not already done so, that this year's challenge for International Womens' Day, (held in March) was to think of two women who had made an impression on you or influenced your lives in any way; and then to write approximately 20 - 30 words on each, explaining why they have been chosen.

Marcia would like to compile a list for the club to reflect upon.

Lobbying and Advocacy

In Marcia's email of 4th June to club members she forwarded an email from Isobel Huggett, Regional Programme Action Officer, sharing an item from UK PAC in respect of Predatory Marriage and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

"The Club Challenge" is to see how many members will write to their local MP in respect of both these matters. Marcia has a template if anyone would like a copy and she would like to know which members have done this and how many of you have received a reply.



All participants of the Regional Rosebowl 2019