

WORLD WAR II

The war years did not halt the progress of the Soroptimist movement in the North West Divisional Union, the difficulties only presented a challenge. The Divisional Union and the North Wirral Club already had a project in hand at the outbreak of the war to form a Soroptimist Club in Chester, and the promoters were determined to forge ahead.

It was fitting that the Charter Luncheon of the new Chester Club in November 1940 was attended by Miss E Glen Doble of the North Wirral Club in her capacity as President of the North West Divisional Union. Miss E Glen Doble was also instrumental in forming a Soroptimist Club in Ellesmere Port in 1943; another war time project which went ahead despite many obstacles.

During the war years the achievements of Soroptimists and their clubs were remarkable. Despite black outs, air raids and travel difficulties, clubs met regularly and worked for local, national and international causes. Miss E Glen Doble recalls two incidents in her year as Federation President: one occasion when she arrived at Leicester at 1.00 am instead of 9.30 pm due to air raids on route, only to find her bed at her hotel already occupied by a man; and another occasion, after chartering a club in Kent, when she travelled to Liverpool by army lorry arriving in the early hours to catch the 2.00 am ferry to Birkenhead and then had to walk 3 miles home.

International charities supported by clubs in the North West Divisional Union included the Soroptimist Post War Relief Fund in Europe, the Overseas Relief Fund for children in France, and individual projects. The first major charity event of the Ellesmere Port Soroptimists was a garden party which raised nearly £200 for the Stalingrad Hospital, one of the ties between the Ellesmere Port club and that Hospital commemorated by a plaque, erected by the Anglo Soviet Russian Committee, in Stalingrad Hospital:

*"A token of admiration from
The Ellesmere Port and District Soroptimist Club"*

The largest part of the work of individual clubs was concerned with topics of local and national interest. Related to the pre-war resolution, to strive for equal pay for equal work, was the protest organised by the Liverpool club in 1941, supported by other clubs in the area, against discrimination on the grounds of sex in the Civilian Personal Injuries Scheme. Clubs raised money to provide social facilities for ambulance men, agitated for the improvement of shopping facilities for professional women in war time, protested at the scarcity and poor quality of childrens shoes, and became involved in many other projects, some of which, like the provision of nursery schools, school meals, and family allowances, only came to full fruition after the war.

Many women's organisations joined together at local level to form Group Action Councils, later known as Standing Conferences of Women's Organisations, to deal with social problems arising from the war. Soroptimists in the North West, as in the rest of the country, played an active part in establishing these Standing Conferences, and serving on local committees. It was reported that by the end of the war a hundred had been established throughout the Federation.

