

A HISTORY  
OF THE  
SCROPTIMIST CLUB  
OF BIRKENHEAD

1933 - 1983

# THE SCROPTIMIST CLUB OF BIRKENHEAD

## PRESIDENTS

1.	Agnes Catnach, M.A.	1933-34
2.	Elsie B. Chester	1934-35
3.	Sophie Somers	1935-36
4.	Edith D. Morrison, LL.B.	1936-37
5.	Margaret Graham	1937-38
6.	Elizabeth G. Dobic, M.P.S.	1938-39
7.	Violet Blyth, M.A.	1939-40
8.	Edith G. Sykes, M.A.	1940-41
9.	H. Gladys Cox	1941-42
10.	Ethel Somers	1942-43
11.	Dora Henderson	1943-44
12.	Marjorie Perrott, M.A.	1944-45
13.	Beryl Saines-Smith, A.I.A.	1945-47
14.	Daisy Jones	1947-48
15.	Elizabeth Ward, M.A.	1948-50
16.	Myfanwy Jones	1950-51
17.	Lilian Allen, S.R.N., S.C.M.	1951-52
18.	Muriel Tompkins, M.P.S.	1952-53
19.	Elizabeth G. Dobie, M.P.S.	1953-54
20.	T.H. Walters	1954-55
21.	Stella Barnett, S.R.N., S.T.D.	1955-56
22.	Margaret T. Gray, M.A.	1956-57
23.	May Edwards	1957-58
24.	Margaret Pringle, S.R.N., S.C.M., M.T.D., H.V.	1958-59
25.	Dorothy Cocker, M.A.	1959-60
26.	Joseen Duncan	1960-61
27.	Patricia Duncan	1961-63
28.	Rebecca Johnson	1963-64
29.	E. McCulley, S.R.N., S.C.M.	1964-65
30.	Ida Farnworth	1965-66
31.	Estelle Anderson, L.R.A.M.	1966-67
32.	Eileen Barford, Cordon Bleu, A.H.E.	1967-68
33.	Nora English, M.B.Ch.B., D.O.	1968-69
34.	Hilda Lynn	1969-70
35.	Ida Farnworth	1970-71
36.	Joyce E. Rowlands, S.R.N., S.C.M.	1971-72
37.	Dorothy Cocker, M.A.	1972-73
38.	Sara A. Garstang	1973-74
39.	Olive Mycock	1974-75
40.	Margaret Pringle, M.B.E., S.R.N., S.C.M., M.T.D., H.V.	1975-76
41.	Phyllis E. Treanor	1976-78
42.	Hilda Windsor	1978-79
43.	Audrey J. Pridgeon	1979-81
44.	Mary H. Paley, LL.B.,	1981-82
45.	Joyce E. Coates	1982-83
46.	Thelma Baldwin, D.T.H.C.	1983-

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## BEGINNINGS OF THE SOROPTIMIST MOVEMENT IN WIRRAL

The first Soroptimist Club in Wirral was formed in 1933 as a daughter club of the Liverpool Soroptimist Club and was known as the North Wirral Soroptimist Club. It was the 26th Club to be formed in Great Britain and amongst the first to be started after the British Federation became a separate entity from that of Europe.

In the year that the North Wirral Club was founded, Miss Helen Catto, M.A., was President of the British Council. Owing to her being detained in Ireland, she was unable to present the Charter of Membership to the North Wirral Club. Miss Margaret Adams (now Dr. Adams), then President of the Liverpool Club, deputised for her. Miss Catnach, the Charter President of the North Wirral Club, received the Charter on the 22nd June 1933.

It is interesting to read the names of the Charter Members and the categories covered by the new Club.

Miss A. Catnach.	Headmistress, Wallasey High School
Dr. Caroline Lowe.	General Practitioner.
Miss E. Chester.	Owner & Head of Private School.
Miss V. Rudge.	Registrar of Births & Deaths.
Dr. A. Williams.	School Medical Officer.
Miss E. Glen Dobie.	Pharmaceutical Chemist (Hospital).
Miss A. Macpherson.	Dress Designer.
Miss K. Brabner.	Teacher of Dancing.
Mrs. Cudworth.	Chiropodist.
Mrs. Cox.	Physiotherapist.
Mrs. Brown.	Owner, Summerville Laundry.
Mrs. Cottier.	Florist.
Miss Jones.	Scientist.
Miss Kelsall.	Matron, Sanatorium.
Miss Rudkin.	Welfare Worker.
Miss Reid.	Teacher of Singing.
Miss S. Somers.	Executive, Washability Bureau, Levers.
Miss Williams.	Tobacconist.
Mrs. Findlay.	Head Supervisor, Guinea Gap Baths.
Mrs. Graham.	Carpet Business.
Mrs. Williams.	Councillor.
Miss Morrison.	Batchelor at Law.
Miss Tyte.	Printer and Stationer.

They chose for their Headquarters the Queens Hotel in Birkenhead where they held two meetings a month.

## The first year of the Club

Naturally the first year was taken up with establishing the Club; the members getting to know one another and learning the business side of the Soroptimist movement. No very ambitious social work was undertaken. The Federation at that time was governed by a Board of Governors, to which each Club sent one member. The significance and importance of this direct connection with Headquarters cannot be too strongly emphasised. Miss Sophie Summers was our representative.

## Development of Membership

The Club started with 23 members. As the years passed numbers and variety of categories increased. In the fifties there were approximately 40 members but in the early seventies this number had declined to little over 20. The average age of the members too was increasing. However today the outlook is promising. Great efforts are being made to introduce new members and categories. Once again the membership is well into the 30's.

## THE SETTING UP OF DAUGHTER CLUBS

In 1945 a new Club was formed in Bebington; therefore the Soroptimist Club of North Wirral became known as the Soroptimist Club of Birkenhead and Wallasey. A year later a separate Club was started in Wallasey; a number of members were transferred to the new Club; those who were left in the parent Club called themselves the Birkenhead Soroptimist Club. The badge worn by its President shows the derivation of the Club for it bears the name North Wirral and that of Miss Catnach as the first President. Meanwhile the Club had founded two other daughter clubs at Chester and Ellesmere Port. In 1946 Hoylake and West Kirby Club were started and finally Heswall in 1949. Birkenhead today still has these six Daughter Clubs.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONNECTION BETWEEN CLUBS AND FEDERATION

### 1. The setting up of Divisional Unions

As the number of Clubs in the Federation increased, the Board of Governors became unwieldy. The direct link between Club and Federation was broken. Divisional Unions were set up. Two members from each Club were elected to the Division Council; from this Council members were now sent to the Board of Governors. The majority of members of Clubs neither knew nor saw their representatives at Headquarters.

North Wirral Club was a member of the North West Division, the largest in the Federation, stretching from Carlisle to Wrexham.

The first meeting of the North West Division was held at Port Sunlight in 1936. However a new re-grouping was made and then North Wirral was attached to South North West Division. In 1949 a second division was made; the Club of Birkenhead was now attached to the Division of Cheshire and North Wales, now known as Cheshire, North Wales and Wirral.

From the beginning of the Divisions, the Club has been active and influential in all aspects of the work. The following members of the Birkenhead Club as known today, have been Presidents of the Divisional Council.

Miss E.G. Dobie	1940-42
Miss D. Henderson	1946-47
Miss L.E. Ward	1950-51
Miss J.E. Duncan	1963-64
Mrs. P.P. Duncan	1969-70

## 2. The Relation of the Club with the Federation

Even after the establishment of the Division Councils, Birkenhead has maintained especially close relations with the Federation. In 1941 Miss Dobie was elected Vice-President of the Federation and in 1942, at the Federation Conference in London, was elected Federation President.

## 3. Birkenhead Club and the Annual Conference

The Club has always sent delegates to the conference; prepared carefully its attitudes to the business to be discussed. Resolutions to be considered have also been sent, the most important being one in 1944. This was forwarded by Birkenhead, Wallasey and Bebington. They urged "that immediate consideration be given to plans for the establishment of Federation Headquarters on a sound financial basis". In this they had the very strong support of Miss Helen Catto (President of the Soroptimist National Council 1930-1932). Up to that time there were no paid officers, a serious reflection on an organisation of well-paid professional and business women. The outcome of the resolution was the eventual purchase of 63 Gayswater Road, London in 1948. The next year Miss Dora McClellan, personal assistant to Dame Caroline Haslett, was appointed the first paid Executive Officer of the Federation.

## 4. Birkenhead and Soroptimist Headquarters

Many members of the Birkenhead Club have stayed at Soroptimist Headquarters but most important of all from 1955 to 1971 Miss Henderson of the Birkenhead Club was Secretary to the Headquarters Management Committee. Her unstinted efforts to develop and keep them on a sound financial footing did much to help them to play an essential part in Soroptimism. Those who

realise the magnitude of the work done at 63 Bayswater Road in the development of international understanding will appreciate her contribution. This was recognised ten years ago by her being made an Honorary Member of the Federation at the Edinburgh Conference in 1971.

### WORK OF THE BIRKENHEAD CLUB

#### a) Social work

The Club's early social work had to be devoted chiefly to helping women. An amusing sidelight on the changed values of money is shown by the amounts donated.

In 1934 the Helping Fund was established. Some of the worthwhile causes to which contributions were made were:-

1. A Fund for helping distressed gentlewomen.
2. The Fletcher Roger Home for Women in difficulties and unmarried mothers.
3. A Holiday Fund to help deserving women.

In 1934 an urgent case of an elderly lady needing a month's holiday was reported by Miss Woolley and Miss Tyte. £2/15/0 was given her for necessary expenses. A girl of 15, suffering from tuberculosis, was given 2/= a week for a month to buy extra nourishment.

In these early years of the Club other social work included the entertainment of unemployed women, the holding of Christmas parties for the elderly, the sending of parcels and Postal Orders at Christmas. In 1946 a bed unit was given and named in the Weightman Ward at Birkenhead General Hospital. Also books which were much appreciated by the women prisoners were sent to U.M. Prisons.

#### b) Housing project

One of the most worthwhile pieces of social work was the establishing of a Fund to be used eventually to provide a house for elderly people of limited means. Later a Housing Association was formed, a house purchased in Knowsley Road, Rock Ferry and the necessary alterations made. This house, which was named "The Moorings" had 9 bedsitting rooms, a comfortable communal lounge with T.V. and a resident Warden who, with her husband, lived rent free in return for services. This was the first home of its kind in Birkenhead. Today it is no longer connected with the Club. A few years ago the need to bring the fire precautions up to modern standards faced the Club with a financial problem which they could not hope to solve. Therefore it was taken over by the Merseyside Improved Houses.

So convinced were the members of the Club that there was a great need for this type of accommodation for the older folk of the town that the Club organised a meeting. Members of the Birkenhead Housing Committee, the W.V.S., and others interested were invited to meet at Birkenhead High School (through the kindness of the Headmistress, Miss Winter, a Birkenhead Soroptimist) to discuss the matter. A film of the Salford Housing Scheme was shown. The outcome was the purchase by the Corporation of houses in Shrewsbury and St. Andrew's Roads for this purpose.

#### c) Some Present-Day Causes

During more recent years the Club has given its support to the Birkenhead North End Involvement Group, which is doing a tremendous and worthwhile job of work for both young and old in the North End of Birkenhead. This is in addition to giving financial aid to Elizabeth House, the experimental Youth Club, founded in North London by the Federation; to the Leonard Cheshire Homes; the Samaritans; Abbeyfield; RUKBA; Guide Dogs for the Blind; associations for research into the causes and cure of Rheumatism; Arthritis, Cancer, Heart Diseases; the Royal Lifeboat Association and many other causes.

One of our most interesting projects is the contact we have established with a blind African boy in Sierra Leone. Mohammed Pofana (aged 11) has been a pupil at Milton Mangai School for the Blind, Freetown. We sponsor him through the British Commonwealth Society for the Blind and send gifts. Last Christmas we sent a letter in Braille. We receive school reports which are very promising and have offered to sponsor an operation to restore his sight but have been told there is no possibility of this.

This year we are helping centres for unemployed school leavers and building up a fund for a centre to help teenagers on probation.

The Club has also helped all appeals from the Federation towards helping countries in the Third World.

From 1974 to the present day we have allocated over £6,000 spent from money given to special efforts.

#### d) Golden Jubilee effort

In 1970 the Soroptimist Movement celebrated its 50th Anniversary. Four years previously the Federation had put forward a suggestion that Soroptimist Headquarters should be altered and improved and that a Scholarship Fund should be established as ways of marking the Golden Jubilee. It proved a long and difficult task to raise the required sum of £50,000 but the Birkenhead Club worked continuously to give its share. In 1970 for the first and only time the Annual Dinner was not held so that the money which would have been spent on it could be donated to the Jubilee Fund.

## FRIENDSHIP LINKS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

At the request of the Board of Governors correspondence has been exchanged with Clubs in Staunton (Virginia), Albany (New York), Walcheren (Holland), Le Pay (France) and Albany (Australia).

Personal contacts were made when Miss Pringle and Mrs. Garner visited Walcheren in 1959 on the occasion of the Club's 10th Anniversary. Miss Joseen Duncan visited Staunton; Mrs. Garstang stayed with the Staunton Club; one of its members came to visit Mrs. Garstang who took her to London, the Lakes and other places in England. Mrs. Garstang is in constant touch with the Club from whom tape recordings of messages from its members have been received and played at our meetings.

In 1960 Miss Emily Moseley and Mrs. Faye Quick, both of the Staunton Club, stayed with Mrs. P.P. Duncan and Miss Dobie, prior to sailing from Liverpool after the Convention in London. Mrs. P.P. Duncan has also close connections with an important Norwegian journalist who has been President of Norway and a delegate to the European Federation. She has visited our Club wearing national dress. The friendship began with an exchanged visit between the son of the two Soroptimists which were arranged by Miss Petrina Macdonald.

A regular correspondence is kept up by Miss Dobie with the Club in Port Elizabeth. Also after reading January's "Soroptimist" Miss Dobie, because of her veterinary connections wrote to Mrs. Amos of the Durban Club congratulating her on being the first woman in South Africa to receive the Jack Boswell Award for dedicated service to her profession of veterinary surgeon. She received by return a most detailed interesting reply from this wife of a vet, mother of two vets, mother-in-law of another and grandmother of two aspiring ones.

Miss Dobie also corresponds with Sydney the first Soroptimist Club in Australia.



## THE SOCIAL SIDE

### 1. The Meeting Meal

From the first the Club had a meal before the meeting. In 1936 it was decided that 1/6 should be paid for the Supper Meal at the Queens Hotel, this sum including the use of the room and service. Today for similar conditions we pay £2.50.

### 2. Annual Dinner

Each year apart from the one already mentioned, the Club has held its Annual Dinner, always a happy gathering of members past and present, members of other Clubs and friends. They have been the highlight of the Club President's year of office. The first one was held at the Hotel Victoria, New Brighton, at a cost of 5/= per ticket. Many distinguished men and women have been our guests on these occasions. They include Miss Addison Phillips, Lord Leverhulme, Mrs. Rosita Forbes, Professor Winifred Cullis, Mrs. Corbett Ashley, Miss Lilian Barker, Miss Christina Folye, Professor Lyon Alease, Miss Irene Hilton, Dame May Curwen (a former pupil of Birkenhead High School) and Lord Evans of Cloughton.

The twenty first Anniversary of the Chartering of our Club was celebrated during the Presidential Year 1953-54. A reception was held in Birkenhead Town Hall, to which were invited the Federation President, members of our Parent Club and those of our six Daughter Clubs. It is interesting to note that the Federation President for that year was a member of one of our Daughter Clubs, Ellesmere Port, Dorothy Griffiths. In 1958 and 1973 the twenty fifth and fortieth Anniversaries were also held in the Town Hall.

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF S.I.A.**  
**(Soroptimist International Association)**

**The Birkenhead Club and S.I.A.**

Since the war the international aspect of the Soroptimist Movement has become more and more important.

In 1948 in Harrogate the first International Gathering since the war was held. At this Convention International officers were elected for the first time and our Club became a member of Soroptimist International Association (known as S.I.A.).

Serious study has always been given by members of Birkenhead Club to the themes set out for four years each at every International Convention under such headings as "Educate for Progress"; "Towards a Literate World"; "The Open Mind to Progress"; "Progress through Action" and our present one "Tomorrows's World". These themes have given members food for thought and research as well as the opportunity of hearing specialist speakers on a wide variety of subjects. Reports of the findings of the Clubs on these subjects have been collated by Miss K. Byrne, Mrs. P.P. Duncan, Miss I. Hindmarsh, Miss D. Cocker and Miss M. Pringle and forwarded through the Division to the Federation.

Our most personal contact however with the expanding work of S.I.A., was in 1959 when Miss Dobie made the journey to South Africa, and had the honour and the privilege of presenting the Charter to Port Elizabeth, on behalf of the Federation President, Miss P. Macdonald, who was unable to go. That first Club has been responsible for the growth and prosperity of the Movement in South Africa by forming Clubs in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. A great work is now being undertaken by all South African members amongst native women and children. There is now a separate Council of Soroptimist Clubs in South Africa.

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Looking back, we are proud of our reputation as a Club; we have sought to live up to the principles of Soroptimism. However, a Club must always be prepared to adapt itself to new developments which will be in the hands of younger women who will carry on the basic aims and objects of Soroptimism in a rapidly changing world.

